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Lamb, Charles, 1775-1834.

CHARLES LAMB

By

ALICE BROWN

THE BLACK DROP BROMLEY NEIGHBORHOOD ELLEN PRIOR CHILDREN OF EARTH OLD CROW LOUISE IMOGEN GUINEY THE PRISONER THE FLYING TEUTON THE ROAD TO CASTALY ROBIN HOOD'S BARN VANISHING POINTS THE SECRET OF THE CLAN MY LOVE AND I HOMESPUN AND GOLD ONE ACT PLAYS THE WIND BETWEEN THE WORLDS

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MICHIGAN STATE

CHARLES LAMB

LIBRARY

A Play

BY
ALICE BROWN

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1924

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PREFACE

CHARLES LAMB'S immortality flowers even more fragrantly in the hearts than in the minds of men. You may, with the scholar's passion, make his work your immediate joy and yet find yourself uneasily aware of a something beyond, a beguilingly dear entity hinted at by the intuitively elect, one that beckons while it eludes you and is—Charles Lamb. And the road to that kindliest phantom is to be found only by the light of an old-fashioned lantern, the musing imagination. If you get him merely in the "too solid flesh" of biographical reminiscence, straightway you lose him. He has slipped away, with a shy facility all his own, leaving you fumbling about in the period where he did indeed walk and meditate, but where you could no more keep him than bind the light of stars to their aerial highways. For gentlemen of his quality have a way of straying abroad all over the lot where men read and think, and you meet them in far places, though chiefly amid the seclusions of your own thought. Also in the odor of old books in leather-lined libraries (midnight musings over the yellowed page) or in saunterings along the few London streets still faithful to the past you may approach them nearly, and that through no direct advance, but by so sensitizing your mind to the lost Atlantis of great writing and great speech that you

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seem yourself to move in it for a happy moment of arrested time.

The biographer and the playwright have a divided duty. The biographer, if he falsify by a syllable to support a theory, a preconceived guesswork, shall be damned. But one may suspect that the more agile the playwright shows himself in withdrawing his foot from the domain of unprolific truth, the better. For him, fact is at a discount, and fancy must be allowed a certain breadth of artistic license. He must so weave the texture of a man's life that, no matter on what faery loom the thread is spun, the completed tapestry moves and trembles and its branches rustle in the wind.

In this colloquy called *Charles Lamb* I have allowed myself to play hob with time and place. The student of letters may justly remind me that Lamb kept no undivided love for Alice, that, indeed, she was not Alice at all but Ann Simmons, and that he dwelt wistfully, in later life, on Fanny Kelly's "divine plain face." But, for the values of our picture, we need a certain clarifying illusion, the entasis that, by making the shaft of a column delicately convex, deceives the eye into finding it straight. And this insistence on a lifelong loyalty is simply our persuasive entasis. A sentence of Lamb himself—and of an exquisite simplicity—must be heeded: "The children of Alice call Bartrum father." Begin with that, wing your way about it, the swallow fancy circling the tower of his dream, and you will arrive at the Charles Lamb of those homespun affections that so challenge the answering affection of the reading world. The very foundation of his nature was loyalty both to persons and places, and the play-

wright, striking the recurrent note of an unswerving attachment to the visionary Alice, achieves, by implication, the Lamb who clung to London, to Mary, to his friends, with such unspoiled simplicity. As to Bartram (for there was a Bartram whom Ann Simmons married) I have incontinently snatched him out of his father's pawnbroking shop and, with no apprenticeship, God save him! made him a silversmith. The three gilt balls are no fruit for our pretty garlands of romance! For reasons perhaps equally capricious and no less high-handed, I have conjured Mary's apprentice, the girl whose innocent bodily presence precipitated the Lamb tragedy, into a kitchen maid. And as to Lamb's stammering tongue, delicious adjunct of his wit, I have ventured to indicate its eccentricity only at one or two salient points, chiefly because I do so love a fair printed page and it seems to me the mind can supply what, when set down literally, is an offense to the eye. I have had no hesitation in juggling with dates to establish a more direct sequence. For life, as seen by human eyes, is not logical, nor do the gods concern themselves greatly about results swiftly arrived at. Often it is only by interrogating Nemesis after a long time, and following the road backward from penalty to a determining act, that we understand even obscurely what has happened to the soul of a man. Doubtless the gods, with their stronger sight and their access to the archives, the palimpsest of air, could make us a fair copy of a man's story if they thought it worth their large and tolerant while; though I suspect they have too many diversions of their own, childlike games full of a richer and, by us, unguessed fantasy. But

the five acts of even a bandy-legged play must limp along more bravely than they are likely to do at the playwright's entreaty before they show a man as he is unless they also show many things as they were not. And after long trying to distil the essence of Charles Lamb's life, ripe with hidden drama, one suspects there may be, according to theatrical conventions, no play in it. One eminent actor questions whether the Lamb madness should not be discarded altogether as being too painful for the average audience. But in the case of the Lambs, the madness is the drama, and we permit ourselves to wonder in turn whether audiences that can sit through fire and flood at the movies might not find a sensitive man's conquest of his own hereditary fears too tame rather than too wild a conflict. At any rate it must be repeated that the moral sanity of the Lambs, in contrast with their mental insecurity, made whatever play their lives afford. What lost cargoes there were in that living past, what implications, a word here and there, to plague us over what we do not know! For example, Manning—what glimpses of him in the flying commentary of Lamb: "a dainty chiel—a man of great power—an enchanter almost—far beyond Coleridge or any man in power of impressing—when he gets you alone he can act the wonders of Egypt." Yet Manning has left behind him scarcely a phrase to prove his quality. He was apparently of those who talk out the best in them and are benumbed by the pen in hand. At least he could make faces, and what can the poor playwright do better than saddle him with that bizarre accomplishment, ingenuously carried away by his own grotesquerie and ready with a laugh at

every least quip of Lamb? For even if one were such an adept of invention as to set up a fictitious Manning, the counterfeit presentment of Lamb's description, he would rival Lamb himself in value; and shall we risk two leaders of the revels in one play? That were to destroy the balance altogether.

Leigh Hunt—wherewithal shall he be clothed, in the garb of earnest radicalism, the armor of moral courage, or the frippery of a child's obtuseness to the value of shillings and pence? Shall we wash in a teetering figure for "comic relief" (hideous phrase of the drama of *clichés!*) a Skimpole borrowed from our betters? Yet Leigh Hunt was, both from a literary standpoint and that of social aspiration, a figure to be respected. He was not always lounging under the trellised roses of a prison wall.

Rickman—a "pleasant hand," Lamb comments, and again, with renewed enthusiasm, a "most pleasant hand": how shall we follow his lead and at not too brisk a pace? for, after all, Rickman is a secondary figure to whom we must lend no undue significance. Or, remembering his bucolic bent, shall we stress that only and confine him to an entrance bearing the symbolic Pig? for assuredly the Pig must staunchly stride among our Persons of the Play, if only to tickle the ears of the groundlings, who will love to think they know as much about Lamb as anybody; and who among them has not heard the legend of Roast Pig? Recall it to them, with the playwright's confidential speciousness (and who is more specious save the confidential essayist?) and you have predisposed them to see, at least for the moment, with your eyes.

There is Martin Burney: of what possible use is he? yet he will push his way in to evoke the gay brutality: "Martin, if dirt was trumps, what hands you'd hold."

And even if, in Act IV, the Lamb coterie merely discourses and dramatically gets no forrarder, it is beyond human power to deny those flame-tipped tongues their brief moment of renewed activity. (Perhaps, to cover all the playwright's necessities, there might be a sequence of Lamb plays: the play for the scholar where the dear old quips are assembled literatim, though to no possible dramatic end; the play of the actor bound over to tradition, a purely mythical plot about a purely conventional Lamb, to divert the unexacting mind. If the actor were distinguished enough, he might fill the house. Who knows? But must he burlesque the beautiful part? Again, who knows?)

How far shall we confess the playwright's turpitude? Shall we remind you that Lamb's release from the East India House came with no such flourish of friendly trumpets as in this audacious paraphrase, and that, moreover, his birthday fell a month before that gala news? But "what would you"? This is a play (so-called!), my masters, this Preface is sufficient apologia, if you mercifully conclude to find it so—"this thornbush my thornbush and this dog my dog." It is not meant to chronicle the weather that beat upon Charles Lamb and his beloved Mary, but the stoutness of heart with which they met it.

Alice Brown.

THE FIRST ACT

CHARACTERS

[*In the order of their appearance*]

John Lamb
Mary Lamb
Mrs. John Lamb
Dolly Vane, a servant
Alice Winterton
Richard Bartram
S. T. Coleridge
Charles Lamb
William Hazlitt
George Dyer
Thomas Manning
Leigh Hunt
Amos Winterton
A Constable
Becky, a servant
Henry Crabb Robinson
Martin Burney
John Rickman
Fanny Kelly
J. S. Munden

CHARLES LAMB

THE FIRST ACT

Time: a late afternoon, 1796.

A sitting-room at 7 Little Queen Street, London. The room is of dark panelled wood, and the furniture, though simple, is antique and dignified. The chairs are comfortable and the sofa has a cushion and a shawl folded for covering. Book-shelves, desk, prints on the walls. Door to hall and street, Right 2. Door to kitchen and other rooms, Left 3. Left 2, fireplace. Near it, a bell pull.

At a table, Centre, sits Mary Lamb, sewing rapidly on a gown. She was "in stature under middle height, possessing well-cut features, and a countenance of singular sweetness, with intelligence. Her brown eyes were soft, yet penetrating; her nose and mouth very shapely; while the general expression was mildness itself. She had a speaking voice gentle and persuasive; and her smile was her brother's own—winning in the extreme. There was a certain catch or emotional breathingness in her utterance . . . which lent a captivating earnestness to her mode of speech when addressing those she

liked. . . . Her manner was easy, almost homely, so quiet, unaffected and perfectly unpretending was it. . . . Her apparel was always of the plainest kind; a black stuff or silk gown made and worn in the simplest fashion. . . . There was a certain old-world fashion in Mary Lamb's diction which gave it a most natural and quaintly pleasant effect."

At the window sits John Lamb with a table before him, absorbedly playing solitaire. He is a "little brisk man." In his earlier days he was "the liveliest little fellow breathing," but now is somewhat "faded in his wits" though in no degree to excite distaste in any one observing him. He "had a face as gay as Garrick's, whom he was said greatly to resemble."

At the up stage end of the fireplace, near the bell pull, sits Mrs. Lamb in a big chair, resting her hand on a cane. She is stiff in the legs and gets about only with the aid of her cane. She is a majestic, handsome woman of the Siddons type.

John. [*Looking up from his game, his hand poised over it.*] Mary!

Mary. [*Cheerfully, but not intermitting her sewing.*] Yes, father.

John. It must be time for Charles.

Mrs. Lamb. [*As Mary gives a despairing shake of the head.*] Mary, why don't you answer?

John. There is some mystery about my son Charles. Where is he?

Mrs. Lamb. [*Remindingly.*] Mary!

John. What is my son Charles's occupation? For the moment I forget.

Mary. Charles is in the employ of the government. He is a clerk in the East India House.

John. What time in the day does he get home?

Mary. He should be out at four.

John. What time is it now?

Mrs. Lamb. [*After an evident hesitation on Mary's part.*] Mary!

Mary. A little after four.

John. [*Triumphantly.*] Charles is late. I can reason. The wits of the Lambs are not all mouldering. Mother!

Mrs. Lamb. Yes, father.

John. Do you want to know what I think about the Lamb wits?

Mrs. Lamb. Yes, father.

John. [*Wisely.*] The Lambs are overweighted with wits. So they lose their balance. Then [*mysteriously*] the world calls them mad.

Mary. [*Hurriedly.*] No, father, no. Don't use that word. Especially to Charles. [*Impressing it on his mind.*] Never use that word to Charles.

Mrs. Lamb. Hush, Mary.

John. [*Suspiciously.*] Why mustn't I use the word? Mother, ring the bell. I want that little scullery maid. Dolly, is her name? Dolly'll tell me the truth. She goes to chapel, where they believe in hell.

Mrs. Lamb. [*Troubled, but soothingly.*] By and by, father. Dolly'll be in by and by.

John. [*Rising, crossing and jerking the bell pull.*] My son has been away longer than from ten to four. There's something odd about it, and you're not telling me.

Mrs. Lamb. Never mind, John, never mind.

John. [*Taking his stand by the fireplace, putting his hands in his pockets and speaking with a chuckling relish.*] Mary, did you know I was for many years body servant to a very clever man here in London? A gentleman eminent in the practice of the law?

Mary. [*Sewing rapidly.*] Yes, father.

John. He would ring his bell for me just as I have rung for Dolly. [*Remembering Dolly has not answered, irritably.*] I' God's name, where *is* Dolly? [*Jerks the bell pull violently. Returns to his post by the fireplace.*]

[*Dolly comes in, Left. She is a round-faced, heavy, blundering girl.*]

Dolly, where is Mr. Charles?

Dolly. [*In a panic of confusion.*] Mr. Charles, sir? Mr. Charles? [*To Mrs. Lamb.*] Oh, Lord forgive me, ma'am, what am I to say?

Mrs. Lamb. [*To her husband.*] Dolly's mind is on her cookery. Roast beef for dinner, dear.

John. So many things to puzzle me. Mary, there. Why does Mary sit sewing day and night? Is't for her dower chest? Yet nobody's asked her hand of me.

Dolly. [*Impetuously.*] Oh, I can tell you that, sir. 'Tis for money. Miss Mary's a hired seamstress, sir, just as I be a hired kitchen wench.

Mrs. Lamb. To your kitchen, Dolly. Go.

Dolly. Yes, ma'am.

[*Gives a panicky look at John Lamb, opens her mouth to speak, shuts it and goes out, Left.*]

John. [*Walking about the room, distraught and*

speaking pathetically.] Where is my son Charles? Ah, they don't tell me. It's as cruel to shut me up in my own mind as if they put me in a mad-house. [*In sudden terror.*] Mary!

Mary. [*Rising, throwing her work on the table and going to him.*] Yes, father.

John. That's not where Charles is? Not in a mad-house?

Mary. O father! father!

John. Poor Charles hasn't found his wits dancing the devil's jig as mine do when I get too clever? Not Charles?

Mary. Don't ask me, father.

Mrs. Lamb. Mary!

[*Mary goes to her, gives her both hands and pulls her out of her chair. Mrs. Lamb sways a moment and gets her balance, meanwhile calling John.*]

John, dear, walk into the other room with me. I want to see the lights come out over the city.

John. [*Delightedly.*] Ah, yes, yes. The lights. Very pretty, the lights. [*Suspiciously.*] You're not taking my mind off?

Mary. [*Supporting her mother on one side while he supports her on the other.*] Mother loves to have you look at the lights with her.

[*Dolly comes in with a tray containing tablecloth, dishes, etc., and glancing about apprehensively, as if she fears more questions. She sets down the tray, takes away Mary's work and folds it and begins to lay the table.*]

John. [*Proudly, as he and Mrs. Lamb go toward the door, Left.*] I'm something of an old beau yet, mother, something of an old beau.

[*John and Mrs. Lamb go out.*]

Mary. [*Turning wearily and sighing. Then aware of Dolly.*] Dolly!

Dolly. Yes, miss.

Mary. When any one asks for Mr. Charles, say he is from home.

Dolly. God bless me, miss, that's the very thing I had on my tongue. But the way Mr. Lamb put the question. 'Twas no more the road I expected it to come than if you were cooking pheasant and it turned into brawn.

Mary. Keep your wits about you.

Dolly. Aye, miss, it's easy enough to keep my wits, but what am I to do with my tongue? As it was, I bit it as you'd bite an apple.

Mary. Bite it again. Swallow it.

Dolly. [*Apprehensively.*] But it's true, ma'am, isn't it? Mr. Charles did—

Mary. [*Harshly.*] Well?

Dolly. [*Desperately.*] Mr. Charles did go to Hoxton, to the 'sylum for poor crazy folk?

[*A knock at the door, Right. Dolly, startled, screams out.*]

Save us! who be that? [*She throws open the door and starts back in amazement.*]

[*Alice Winterton and Bartram come in. Alice is a slender, beautiful girl with blue eyes and golden hair. She wears a light grey dress and cloak and hat. She is excited, in a wistful, girlish way.*

Bartram is a tall, ruddy, handsome young man, dressed in traveling coat and carrying Alice's bag. Dolly falls back in awe and admiration.]

Dolly. Miss Mary!

Alice. [*To Mary, eagerly and appealingly.*] Does Mr. Lamb live here?

[*Bartram shuts the door, goes to the window and stands looking out as if he had no share in the interview. Dolly makes a pretense of laying the table, but stares, open-mouthed.*]

Mary. My father or my brother?

Alice. [*Impulsively taking Mary's hands.*] You are Mary Lamb.

Mary. Yes. [*Offers her a chair.*] Sit you here.

Alice. Your brother talks of nobody but you.

Mary. [*Stopping as she is bringing a chair for herself.*] Who are you?

Alice. I am Alice Winterton.

Mary. [*Amazed.*] Alice?

Alice. [*Eagerly.*] Has he spoken of me?

Mary. Spoken of you? [*Remembering Bartram and catching herself up.*] May I know this gentleman?

Alice. [*Calling him.*] Mr. Bartram!

[*Bartram comes down.*]

[*To Mary.*] Mr. Bartram has been so good to me. He came to Blakesware—where I live, you know, with father.

Bartram. [*To Mary.*] I am a silversmith, ma'am. I was sent down to value some old plate.

Mary. Blakesware is where my grandmother lives.

Alice. Where your brother came. Where he and

I met. But as to Mr. Bartram—he was returning to London and took such kindly care of me.

Mary. Will you sit, sir? Dolly, a pot of ale.

Dolly. [*Plunging toward the door, Left, and stopping suddenly.*] Miss Mary?

Mary. Well?

Dolly. If they ask me who wants it? If they say, "Is 't Mr. Charles?"

Mary. [*Irritated.*] A pot of ale.

[*Dolly goes out in a blundering haste, Left. Mary takes off Alice's cloak. Bartram sits by the fire.*]

[*Wonderingly.*] Charles said your hair was gold.

Alice. Mr. Bartram!

[*Bartram rises and crosses to her.*]

I can't say how grateful I am to you for bringing me here. But I must not trouble you further.

Bartram. [*Bluntly.*] Where do you lodge to-night?

Alice. I have money. I can find an inn.

Bartram. When the coach stopped, your father was half a mile behind.

Alice. [*Terrified.*] My father?

Bartram. That's why I slipped you out of the coach. Didn't you hear the horse that clattered up, and how the driver swore?

Alice. My father! Was that why you took my hand?

Bartram. [*Nodding.*] And bolted into a shop and out at the other door, with the prentices crying "Who's there?" Your father's here in London.

Alice. [*Hurriedly.*] Then I must say all quickly. Go, good friend. And thank you.

Bartram. [*Stoutly.*] Let you meet him by your-

self? Not I. I've seen fathers on the stage. I've heard of Squire Winterton in his spleen.

Alice. That I must bear.

Bartram. He'll say—[*hesitating*] Mistress Winterton, he'll say we made a runaway match of it.

Alice. He couldn't. 'Twould be false.

Bartram. In the presence of this good lady, I vow that if that were so I should be the happiest man alive. And if you'll take my name—

Alice. No! no!

Bartram. If he casts you off, I beseech you come to me. My mother'll welcome you. The time may not be ripe, but if you'll think of me!

Alice. [*Distressed.*] Have I done something so strange it requires such medicine? Mr. Bartram, leave us, for a moment. What I have to say is full of difficulty.

Bartram. I'll wait outside. And if he comes, trust me.

[*Bartram goes out, Right.*]

Alice. [*Turning to Mary and taking her hands.*] Mary Lamb! Charles's sister who understands him, so he says. Even his faults.

Mary. Charles's faults? My eyes are good enough to thread a cambric needle, but they have yet to spy out Charles's faults.

Alice. He says you and he are like heart and brain working together.

Mary. I'm older than Charles.

Alice. You understand him. Will you understand me?

Mary. I'll try. [*Pulls forward chair and they sit.*]

Alice. Your brother came to Blakesware.

Mary. To visit grandmother.

Alice. We met. [*Impatiently.*] How much do you know?

Mary. [*Warmly.*] I know how Charles was changed. He had a passion for you.

Alice. He told me so.

Mary. You refused him.

Alice. What could I do?

Mary. You couldn't love him?

Alice. [*In despair.*] I'm only seventeen. My mother is dead. I keep my father's house. That has made me older than I am.

Mary. You're nothing but a child.

Alice. [*Delightedly.*] You see that? Why, on that day— [*Stops.*]

Mary. What day?

Alice. The day your brother told me I—pleased him—Mary Lamb, what do you think I was doing the very minute before I came down to meet him?

Mary. [*Smiling.*] Playing games?

Alice. Sewing lace on a doll's spencer.

Mary. Poor lonely child!

Alice. My doll. I hide her in the clothes press. She sleeps with me at night.

Mary. [*Smiling.*] Let Charles see you with the doll. Then he'll understand.

Alice. No. I look so old. This hateful hair! My father makes me coil it. [*Impatiently pulls out the pins and lets it down.*] See, Mary Lamb, do I look old now?

[*Mary gets up, goes behind her and, gathering the hair up gently, begins to braid it.*]

Mary. Pretty hair.

Alice. So when your brother spoke to me of—of—

Mary. [*Steadily.*] Of marriage. [*Goes back to her chair.*]

Alice. I was angry. I broke out at him. I cried and said, "No! no!"

Mary. He came home—to me.

Alice. Did he tell you?

Mary. Not then. But he brooded—and sickened—and got melancholy because my father felt the change in him and himself began to brood.

Alice. I know.

Mary. Who told you?

Alice. This good Bartram. He said to my father, in the way of talk, "They tell me at the India House young Charles Lamb, the clerk, has lost his wits. They've put him in Hoxton mad-house." [*Cries out in grief.*] Oh!

Mary. [*Proudly.*] Charles went to Hoxton of his own will. He was afraid of showing his spleen at home, afraid of the effect on father. He thought at Hoxton there'd be some medicine for a mind diseased.

Alice. I said to Mr. Bartram, "Take me to London, to Mr. Lamb."

Mary. He should have refused. [*Indignantly.*] A young man and a maid.

Alice. He did refuse. So I took the coach a mile along the road.

Mary. Foolish child! If you must come, 'twere better to come alone.

Alice. [*Hanging her head.*] I was afraid—of London. Your brother told me it is heaven, but I dreamed of dark streets.

Mary. [*Firmly.*] You must go back by the next coach.

[*Dolly comes in, Left, with a mug of ale.*]

Alice. I must see your brother. Where is he?

Mary. In Hoxton asylum.

Dolly. [*Triumphantly.*] There, Miss Mary! You told yourself.

Mary. Your kitchen, Dolly. Turn the roast.

Dolly. But here be the ale, Miss Mary, man's measure and only two maids to drink un. It be a shame to waste a bead like that.

Mary. Carry it to the gentleman on the landing.

[*Dolly goes out, Right, carrying the ale with a breathless importance.*]

Alice. Will you take me to your brother?

Mary. Do you love him?

Alice. O Mary Lamb, I love my doll!

[*Dolly comes in, Right. Crosses, but stands staring.*]

Mary. Then why do you break in on him again when he is wearying to forget you?

Alice. He has lost his mind.

Mary. [*Proudly.*] Not lost. He has tired it, as you might tire your wrist.

Alice. I could cure it. I could say to him, I am Alice. I didn't mean to hurt you. [*A knock, Right.*] My father! [*Enter Bartram.*]

Bartram. A gentleman is coming up the stairs.

Alice. My father?

Bartram. No. Mayhap a messenger from him.

Mary. Dolly, take this lady to my room.

Alice. No. If I've done wrong I'll face it.

Mary. The roast, Dolly, turn the roast.

[*Dolly goes out, Left. Coleridge comes in, Right. "His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent, his chin good-humored and round; but the nose was small, feeble. He was above the common size, inclining to the corpulent. His long hair, glossy and black, fell in smooth masses over his forehead." He talked on poetry, on philosophy, on life in general, in a rolling flood of eloquence, forgetting time and all earthly considerations.*]

Mary. [*Relieved.*] Coleridge! Sam!

Coleridge. [*Saluting gravely.*] Mary.

Mary. [*To Alice.*] This is Charles's friend.

Alice. [*Shyly.*] Mr. Coleridge. The poet. I have heard of him.

Mary. Mistress Winterton.

Coleridge. [*Amazed at seeing her.*] The fair-haired Mistress Alice. [*Bowing to her with stiff courtesy.*] I had thought of you, Mistress, as an evil witch binding a man to the wheel of love-madness with your golden hair. But if you are not of angelic lineage then angels have not survived the fall.

Bartram. [*With distaste. To Mary.*] I'm a plain man, Miss Lamb, and I'll go play watch dog on the stairs.

[*He goes out, Right.*]

Mary. [*Anxiously, to Coleridge.*] Have you seen Charles?

Coleridge. I stayed an hour with him.

Alice. At Hoxton?

Coleridge. Yes, Mistress Winterton. Mary, he bade me say to you— [*Hesitates. Then with a ponderous courtesy, places chairs for them.*]

Mary. [*Impatiently.*] Yes! Yes! How is he?

Coleridge. I should have been here before, but I stopped at a book-stall and found this. Listen, Mary. [*Takes a book from his pocket and reads.*] "That were happiness when every man hath sufficient labor to occupy one-third of the day and sufficient pleasure to occupy the rest."

Mary. But Charles!

Alice. O Mr. Coleridge, tell us of him.

Coleridge. [*Falling into a rapt musing.*] This essay recalls to me my own dream of setting sail, a chosen company of us, to America, the banks of the Susquehanna. I have neglected to ascertain where that river is, but its majestic name enchants me.

Mary. I know, I know. I entreat you to tell us about Charles.

Coleridge. There on the Susquehanna we might live, a happy colony, supporting life by the labor of our hands for two or three hours in the day and reading the poets for the remainder.

Mary. Dear Coleridge, another day you may talk me blind and deaf, but now tell me of Charles.

Coleridge. Yes, Mary. I came on purpose to tell you. [*Growing bemused again.*] As I walked along, the lamps were not all lighted. I looked up at the stars—Orion in his splendor, the Great Bear. Mary, what is beyond the stars?

Mary. [*Shaking his arm.*] But Charles?

Alice. I beg you, sir. Give us news of him.

Coleridge. [*Coming awake.*] Well! The news is, he's better.

Mary. [*Anxiously.*] Was he serious?

Coleridge. Fairly serious.

Mary. Not making puns?

Coleridge. One, perhaps, and another to keep it company.

Mary. [*Relieved.*] That's well. [*To Alice.*] When his mood is darkest, he sometimes puns the most.

Alice. I've learned that. [*To Coleridge.*] And he's better?

Coleridge. He's coming home.

Mary. When? [*She begins to light candles.*]

Coleridge. To-night. I hurried on in advance to say he will come in quite as usual, as if from his day's work.

Mary. [*Nodding.*] Not to agitate father.

Coleridge. He wants no rejoicing made and no excitement.

Alice. I must not surprise him. I must go.

Mary. But where, child?

Alice. To a tavern. There must be plenty.

Mary. [*Puts her hand to her head.*] No! No! Let me think.

Alice. [*Opening the door, Right, and calling.*] Mr. Bartram!

[*Bartram comes in.*]

[*Catching up her cloak and thrusting her bag on him.*] Will you take this, please?

Bartram. [*Going to the door and listening.*] Some one has come into the court below.

Coleridge. [*Majestically.*] Do not be concerned, young man. This is no place to tempt marauders.

Bartram. I'll look down the stairs upon him. [*Stepping out and returning.*] 'Tis Mr. Lamb.

Mary. Charles!

Alice. [*To Mary.*] Hide me.

Mary. [*Running to the door, Left, and opening it.*] The first door to the right. 'Tis my room.

[*Alice runs out, Left.*]

[*Hurriedly, to Bartram.*] Go along the passage to the kitchen and so out.

Bartram. [*Pointing to door, Right.*] Can I find my way back to that door?

Mary. [*Impatiently.*] Yes, yes.

Bartram. 'Tis there I must play watch dog and wait for Squire Winterton.

[*He goes out, Left, Mary closing the door hastily after him. She crosses in a high state of excitement. Coleridge, bewildered, stands staring. Charles Lamb comes in. "A light frame . . . clad in clerk-like black, was surmounted by a head of form and expression the most noble and sweet. His black hair curled crisply about an expanded forehead; his eyes, softly brown, twinkled with varying expression, though the prevalent feeling was sad; and the nose, slightly curved and delicately carved at the nostril, with the lower outline of the face regularly oval, completed a head which was finely placed on the shoulders and gave importance and even dignity to a diminutive and shadowy stem. Who shall describe his countenance, catch its quivering sweetness, and fix it*

forever in words? . . . Deep thought, striving with humor, the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth, and a smile of painful sweetness, present an image to the mind it can as little describe as lose. His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterised by what he himself says" of another "a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel." "His step was plantigrade, which made his walk slow and peculiar." His stuttering was infinitely funny and effective, but was not continuous. It came at odd dramatic moments.]

Charles. Ah, Mary, it's a flood outside. I looked for an ark. And took a cab.

Mary. [*Feeling his clothes and, though excited, keeping herself cool.*] Are you damp?

Charles. Dry as the East India House ledgers. [*With sudden seriousness.*] Father not at his game? He's ill?

Mary. Mother took him to see the lights come out.

Charles. [*To Coleridge.*] Sam, you've been as long on the way as the Children of Israel getting to the Promised Land. [*To Mary.*] I started him here in mid-afternoon. I knew he'd find a book-stall and get becalmed. [*Going to the book-shelves and passing his hand lovingly over the backs of the volumes.*] Ah, my midnight darlings! Coleridge, see this Milton. Cost me two and six. Immortality for the price of a bottle of Malmsey.

[*Coleridge takes the volume from Lamb and stands lost in it. Lamb seats himself.*]

What's for dinner?

Mary. [*Affectionately. Going about the table and giving it little touches.*] Less than if I'd known you were coming.

Charles. Coleridge, if you could choose among all the meats in the world, what would you eat?

Coleridge. [*Waking out of his trance over the book. Raptly.*] I would eat nightingales' tongues. So I might speak music.

Charles. I would eat pigs' feet. For mind you, Coleridge, there's a choice in feet. You, being a poet, shall be fed on the feet of majestic verse. I, being something more earthy, will browse on the feet of the gelatinous, succulent pig.

[*Dolly comes in with a pewter plate containing the loaf. She drops plate and loaf in her amazement, and Mary, in despair, picks them up.*]

Mary. Dolly! Dolly! Dolly!

Dolly. Lord save us! Mr. Charles!

Charles. Well, Dolly, well. Mary, don't dust off the bread. It was grown in dust. To dust it has returned.

[*Dolly still stares at him, open-mouthed.*]

What is it, Dolly? Does my countenance not preserve its former majesty? Do you find me plaided like a Scotsman or bearded like the pard?

Dolly. You've come home, Master Charles.

Charles. Aye, Dolly, I knew that. Thank God.

Mary. Serve the dinner. [*Dolly goes out.*] She grows worse and worse.

Charles. She's an honest wench.

Mary. 'Tis her dulness that wears on me. I'd rather the girl would lie, so she kept the bread on the

plate. Charles, I believe we can meet all the biggest ills of life with a smile, but these pin-pricks, these nettles—oh, she's a tiresome chit!

[*Lamb, with a whimsically apologetic look at her, has gone to the little chimney cupboard, taken out a pipe, and is filling it. Mary puts her hand affectionately on his arm.*]

Smoking? Before dinner?

Charles. [*Coaxingly.*] In case I didn't live till dinner. Man's life is but a breath. Man's pipe is—[*Takes a luxurious puff, removes the pipe from his mouth and kisses his hand to it.*] What was I saying? Man's life is but a breath. You can get a hundred breaths out of a pipe. If I went to war, I'd go as a piper. [*Catching her hand as she passes.*] Don't look like that, Mary. I'm not going to war. These are the piping times of peace. I'll leave off smoking, I swear I will—tomorrow.

[*A knock. Mary runs apprehensively to door, Right.*]

[*Calling.*] Come in.

[*Hazlitt comes in, Right, rather shyly. He is the slovenly scholar, with a shambling, awkward gait, his countenance handsome, but tense in expression. He is a man of uncompromisingly strong dislikes. There are no shades in his judgments. His loves are painting and pictures, the theatre, literature, walking, and perhaps his greatest enthusiasm Napoleon Bonaparte. But, like all this little set of intimates, he unqualifiedly loves Lamb. He had a "fierce enjoyment" of all earthly things. He was not a man of many friendships. He had senti-*

ment and enthusiasms, but not an unvaryingly warm heart. If any one insisted on shaking hands with him he held out, Leigh Hunt asserted, something like the fin of a fish. While traveling, he was "attired in a dress-coat and nankeen trousers halfway up his legs, leaving his stockings well visible over his shoes."]

Charles. Hazlitt! Good boy, digging yourself up out of your essay writing and your Napoleon worship to come here.

Hazlitt. [*Advancing and speaking with awkward precision, as if he had thought it up as a form of consolation.*] Lamb, you've not been well. If you'd go into the country, for a change, I'm with you. We could take a few books and walk our legs off on Salisbury Plain.

Charles. Couldn't do it, Hazlitt. I'm due at India House.

Hazlitt. Nothing like a walk, Charles. A walk and a book. [*Makes for the door, Right.*]

Charles. How is the god of your idolatry?

Hazlitt. [*Returning.*] Napoleon Bonaparte? The man's a king.

[*A knock. Mary hurries to the door, Right.*]

Charles. Come in.

[*George Dyer comes in, carrying a pile of books. He is twenty years older than Lamb, the image of the slipshod scholar, spectacled, with a gaunt awkward form set off by trousers too short, a rusty coat too large, short yet straggling hair, silvered, and dark grey eyes. His clothes are, like Lamb's, "black smalls, black stockings, black*

shoes, the knee-smalls and the shoes both being tied with strings instead of fastened with buckles." When spoken to he is likely to "start like an unbroke heifer." His one interest in life is in books and his friends. He is kindness itself, but absent-minded, shy, nervous and awkward. "He had a trick of filling up his hesitating sentences with a mild little monosyllabic sound—'abd—abd—abd'—and of finishing his speeches with an incomplete phrase: 'Well, sir, but however—'" He now finds the greatest difficulty in getting past Hazlitt, who is making for the door. They dodge each other and finally Hazlitt slips out.]

Dyer. [*Depositing the books on the table in a disordered heap and knocking off the bread, which Mary picks up.*] Charles, I brought you round these few books. I've no use for 'em.

Charles. [*Examining them one by one, and much moved.*] Spenser! That's the copy you starved a week to get.

Dyer. Don't prize it in the least, I assure you, not in the least.

Charles. Compleat Angler! You old hypocrite! Mary, these are books he doesn't prize. And this. Look at this. Vaughan. And Donne. And he doesn't prize 'em. So he brings 'em here to me to help me forget I've been in Hoxton asylum. But I'm well, Dyer, well. In fact, I never was ill. I couldn't be ill enough to deserve three priceless books like these. Even death wouldn't earn 'em for me.

Mary. [*Tenderly.*] I'll put them up here on the shelf, Mr. Dyer, and when Charles and I are walking

we'll take them home to you. [*Puts them on shelf. Then picks up her work and sits at right of table and sews.*]

Dyer. [*Distressed.*] I tell you, I've no room for 'em.

Charles. [*Affectionately.*] I'll keep 'em a while, as Mary says, and use 'em kindly, but they'll go back to you.

Dyer. [*Despairingly.*] Too bad! Too bad! Thought you'd like 'em. Nothing else to bring. [*Resignedly.*] Well, sir, but however—"

[*A knock. Mary hurries to the door, Right.*]

Charles. Come in.

[*Manning comes in. He is a sedate, contained looking man, well dressed and in all respects a conventional modest gentleman. He has a dramatic gift which makes him ingenuously eager to attempt this or that facial expression, and his admiration for Lamb brings out of him a quick laugh when Lamb is nonsensical or absurd.*]

Manning! Who sounded the pibroch for the clans to gather?

Manning. [*Advancing quietly.*] Dyer. He told us you'd come home.

Charles. God bless him. Old pelican, plucking out his feathers to warm this skinny Lamb.

[*Slaps Dyer, who has been standing by in discomfort, heartily on the back. Dyer collapses, but beams with delight.*]

Manning. I'm sailing in a week.

Charles. Oh, not for China?

Manning. For China.

Charles. Let business perish. Don't go, Manning. Chinamen are so queer. Queer eyes, queer mugs. Sit at home and devote yourself to the mugs here—mugs of ale. That's China enough for an honest Englishman. Think what a lot of queues there are in China, and if you mind 'em all you'll have no peace. D'you hear, Mary? Pun! Peace. P's and q's. Peace—queues. P's—q's. [*Goes on repeating it.*]

Mary. [*Quietly, to Manning.*] Charles will miss you.

Charles. [*Fractiously.*] Miss him? If one miss is as good as a mile, Manning's going tunnels a hole through the earth.

Manning. [*To Charles.*] I could get you an appointment. Wouldn't you come along? Just for your health, you know.

Charles. God bless you, no. But God bless you. Go to China! 'Tis heathendom. They'd eat me. I hear 'em now. "Is this Lamb? Actually Lamb? Pass the mint sauce." No, Manning, no. I'll sit at my desk in India House and let the world come to me—indigo, spices, cochineal—and pearls.

Manning. All the same, you could get a competency in China without delay. And time for writing.

Coleridge. [*Rousing from his book.*] China? China? Lamb, if you leave London it must be for the west, not the east. Now in my proposed colony, on the banks of the Susquehanna, a man need work but two or three hours a day.

Charles. I should pine for London—or the grave. [*With sudden gloom.*] And there no man works.

[*A knock. Mary hurries to door, Right.*]

Come in.

[*Leigh Hunt comes in, dressed in the mode and on tiptoe with eagerness. "There was a glee about him which evinced high spirits . . . and vivacity." A "joyous poet," of "tricksome fantasy." He is tall, slender, with waving black hair and sparkling black eyes.*]

Leigh Hunt!

Hunt. My dear Lamb, Dyer told me you're at home.

Charles. Yes. I'm back from Hoxton.

Hunt. [*Fluttering about him.*] If you'd listened to me, you wouldn't have broken down.

Charles. Bless your infantile soul! What's your medicine for a mind diseased? a flowered waistcoat?

Hunt. Beauty, Lamb, beauty. Let me tint these rooms. Let Mary wear a light shimmering silk, peacock blue.

Manning. Mary, I'll bring you a silk from China.

Mary. [*Looking up from her work, quietly.*] Not peacock blue.

Hunt. Lamb, I insist on prescribing for you. Beauty! beauty!

Coleridge. [*Looking up from his book.*] Charles, in my colony on the banks of the Susquehanna you would find beauty's twin sister, peace.

Manning. He's not going to your outlandish river. He's going to China.

Charles. God bless all of you, I'm going no further than India House, to make invoices of goods.

Hunt. Then, you'll simply have to come round

seven evenings a week and sit in my rooms. In silence, Charles. You will bathe in beauty. Bathe in it!

Manning. [*In distaste.*] I've seen your rooms, Hunt. They're like a lady's trinket box.

Charles. Not for bathing purposes. Too perishable.

Hunt. [*Ecstatically.*] Furnished in rose-colored satin. The ceiling pale blue with constellations in silver stars. [*Kissing his fingers to the air.*] Beauty!

Manning. You're a wonder. You actually sit in that satin trinket box and turn out biting satires against the Regent.

Hunt. [*Hissing.*] From that satin lined nest I hatch out asps and cockatrices. I am printing a review. Lamb, where are your verses on the Regent?

Charles. [*With sudden interest, rising and going to a drawer of the desk.*] The Prince of Whales?

Mary. [*Worried.*] Don't spread those verses, Charles.

Charles. [*Taking them out and running them over, smiling.*] Prince of Whales! Lord, he *is* a blubberly fellow.

Hunt. Give them here.

Mary. [*To Charles.*] You mustn't antagonize the government. If you're turned out of India House— [*Stops in despair.*]

Charles. I know. Slaughter of the Innocents. Lamb pie. But there's no harm in the verses—so long as they're not read. Here, Hunt! they're yours, but not for print. [*Gives them to Hunt.*]

Hunt. I'll keep 'em hid.

Charles. Read 'em to yourself. None other.

Hunt. I will.

Charles. In the dead vast and middle of the night.

Hunt. [*Reading and laughing immoderately.*] Prince of Whales! ha! ha! Prince of Whales!

Charles. How potent a thing is the letter H. It bedevils a cockney's tongue, it turns a titled nincompoop into a fish.

Manning. Come, Hunt, Lamb's had enough of us for one night.

Mary. [*Earnestly.*] You were good to come.

Charles. Did ever man own so many friends! And may you all hang merrily for turning me into a cry-baby. [*Dashes a tear from his eyes, with the back of his hand.*]

Manning. We'll go, Mary.

Mary. [*Gently.*] He's just home, you know.

Manning. Mary's right. Come along, Hunt.

[*Manning takes Hunt by the arm, and turns him about toward the door, but Hunt keeps turning about and calling back:*]

Hunt. Wear a rose at your buttonhole, Charles. Beauty! beauty! Mary get something in pale blue.

[*Hunt and Manning go out, Right.*]

Coleridge. [*Wistfully, rising and putting his book on the shelf.*] I had hoped not to go till I had once more seen the celestial visitant.

Charles. [*Affectionately.*] What do you mean, you fisherman on the banks of fairy rivers, you seer of visions and dreamer of dreams?

Coleridge. [*Earnestly.*] Oh, but she's not a vision. "She walks in beauty like the night."

Charles. Where was she walking, old balloon merchant? on the banks of your Susquehanna?

Mary. [*Hastily.*] Coleridge, the seven sleepers never dreamt as you do. [*Listening.*] Mother's coming. And father.

Mrs. Lamb. [*Calling as she enters, Left, solicitously helped by John.*] Charles! do I hear Charles?

[*Charles rises, puts his pipe on the mantel and meets them. Mrs. Lamb forsakes her husband's arm and clings to Charles tearfully. John looks at him, perplexed.*]

John. [*Inquiringly.*] My son?

Charles. [*Heartily.*] India House is busy as a hive. Inventories. I've got through the B's, a swarm of 'em. Likewise the C's, a flood of 'em. And proceeding hopefully to the X's. Unknown quantities. There I shall be swamped.

John. [*Reassured.*] Ah, it is my son. [*Goes to his card table and seats himself.*] Now what is it you do at India House, Charles, to take the entire day from ten to four?

Charles. [*Puts his mother tenderly into her chair and then goes to his father and overlooks the game.*] We sit on stools in an enclosure, railed in so that the world can't get at us and spoil our ugly mugs, and we write things in books about indigo and cinnamon and wine and pearls.

John. [*Perplexed, but chiefly interested in his game.*] That hardly seems to me an occupation for a man of genius. Do you like it, my son?

Charles. Better than the alternative, father.

John. Now what might the alternative be?

Charles. No pigs' feet. No mugs of ale. No bed. No board. No credit. No tick. No tick. No

watch. No watch, no time o' day. All times o' night. Chaos.

John. [*Absorbed in his game.*] Four kings—four aces—spades—spades.

Mrs. Lamb. Charles!

[*Lamb goes to her. She puts a hand on his coat sleeve and smooths it.*]

Charles. Yes, mother.

Mrs. Lamb. I'm glad you've come.

Charles. Yes, mother. Here's your bad penny back, stuttering tongue and all. And he's got the best of his black moods. They're diluted with philosophy. Now they're only grey.

Mary. [*Looking up from her work.*] Philosophy, Charles? And courage.

Charles. It is courage, Mary. That's it. Courage.

[*A knock, Right.*]

Hunt has come back to bring me a rose-colored sash and a jeweled dagger, or an ostrich feather for my hat. [*Mimicking Hunt, tenderly.*] Beauty! beauty! beauty!

Mary. I'll see. [*Throws her work hastily aside. Opens the door.*]

Charles. [*Seeing Bartram.*] Bartram? of the silver shop.

Mary. [*Trying to sign Bartram not to enter.*] I'll step outside and speak to you.

Charles. No, no. Come in.

[*Bartram comes in.*]

Bartram. I've come for Mistress Winterton.

Charles. [*Starting back.*] Winterton!

Mary. [*To Bartram.*] Hush!

Coleridge. [*Looking up from his book.*] The angel, Charles.

John. [*To Bartram.*] Do you play solitaire, sir? [*Goes on with his game.*]

Bartram. [*Looking from one to another impatiently.*] I've come back for Mistress Winterton.

Charles. [*Passing his hand across his forehead.*] That is a name I meant to forget. A name that rang in my ears until I—it deafened them.

Mrs. Lamb. [*To Mary.*] What does he mean?

Mary. [*Going to Charles.*] Charles, what if it were real?

Charles. [*Piteously.*] Mary, you wouldn't deceive me.

Mary. No.

Charles. [*In great excitement.*] This man here seems to be Dick Bartram. But is he real?

Mary. Yes.

Bartram. Real? What should I be?

Charles. Then why is he talking about Alice Winterton?

Mary. Charles, Alice Winterton has been here.

Charles. In the name of God, why?

Mary. She heard you were ill.

Charles. Heard I was mad?

John. [*Looking up.*] Mad? That's an unpleasant word.

Mary. She came to be friendly, to be kind.

Charles. You saw her?

Mary. Yes.

Charles. You talked to her?

Mary. Yes.

Charles. [*Smiling.*] Ah, Mary, you've been seeing visions, too.

Mary. This young man brought her up from Blakesware. Is he a vision?

Charles. He might be. He's the size. Angel of the Apocalypse, one foot on the sea and one on the land.

Bartram. [*Stoutly.*] No, sir. I'm a plain man, a silversmith, but I've got my feelings and I won't leave the young lady here to be turned into dreams.

Charles. You're a wise man, Mr. Bartram. You refuse to allow your friends to be translated. I wish you could give me the recipe.

Mary. Charles, am I a vision?

Charles. [*Smiling whimsically.*] You talk like one. You did while I was alone at night in Hoxton. You'd come into my room and say, "Charles, I've brought you Alice."

John. What did you say Mary did? What are you talking about?

Charles. Old tales, father, old tales of long ago, ballads, plays, midsummer madness.

John. Madness? That's an unpleasant word.

Mary. [*Pointing to Bartram.*] See this young man. Isn't he real? Touch him.

Charles. No, Mary. I shouldn't pinch an arm of that girth.

Mrs. Lamb. [*With decision.*] Why do you all beat about the bush? Mary, has Alice Winterton been here?

Mary. Yes, mother.

Mrs. Lamb. Where is she now?

Mary. In my room.

Charles. [*Crying out.*] No!

[*Mrs. Lamb reaches up and jerks the bell pull.*]

Bartram. [*To Mrs. Lamb.*] Thank you, ma'am. If you'll kindly send for her.

[*Dolly comes in, Left.*]

Mrs. Lamb. Dolly!

Dolly. Yes, mistress.

Mrs. Lamb. Is there a young lady in Miss Mary's room?

Dolly. Yes, mistress.

Lamb. Ah, Dolly, you've jumped into the vision, too.

Mrs. Lamb. [*To Dolly.*] Tell her to come here.

Mary. No, mother, no! He must not see her unprepared.

[*Dolly goes out, Left.*]

Charles. Mary, I'm as prepared as a mummy. You've wrapped me in spices—of anguish—and swathed me in secrecy. And after all, I'm as dead to any resurrection of belief—or hope—as Pharaoh. [*With sudden seriousness.*] Mary, don't talk about her. It tortures me.

[*Alice comes in, Left.*]

Alice. [*To Mrs. Lamb.*] Madam, you sent for me. I owe you apologies. I am here in your house, yet I have not spoken with you. But she [*indicating Mary*] made me welcome.

Charles. Alice! For all the world like life. Oh, the visions here are glorious! Mary, keep the dream as it is. Don't let it break.

Alice. [*Coming slowly toward him with a look of*

wistful timidity.] Mr. Charles, I'm not a dream. Here is my hand.

Charles. [*Taking it, smiling. Then wonderingly.*] How warm it is. [*Cries out.*] It's real. Feel here in the thumb—a little scar.

Alice. [*Smiling.*] Where I cut it the day I peeled the apple for you.

John. [*Calling.*] Madam, do you know any new games of solitaire?

Alice. [*Prettily.*] I know several, sir. I'll show you, later, if you please to wait for me.

Bartram. [*Advancing.*] Miss Winterton!

Charles. [*Putting him aside with a gesture. To Alice.*] Why did you come?

Alice. They told me you were ill.

Charles. My wits, Alice. I wore them out with thinking on you.

Mary. [*To Bartram.*] Will you speak to my mother, Mr. Bartram? She would ask news of Blakesware.

[*He goes to Mrs. Lamb.*]

Alice. [*To Lamb.*] You thought too much about me. So I came to beg you not to do it again.

Charles. [*Whimsically.*] It isn't an indictable offence to have blue eyes and golden hair.

Mary. Her hair and eyes are as you said, Charles. Only you didn't see her as she really is. It takes a woman to do that.

Charles. How do you see her, Mary?

Mary. As a child. Why, Charles, she has a doll at home and loves it.

Charles. A child! Forgive me, child.

Alice. So I thought I'd come to London and beg you to think sensible things about me, if the foolish ones hurt you so. And then I needn't cry at night.

Charles. Did you cry at night?

Mary. A child. With a doll.

Charles. And did the dolly cry?

Alice. [*Laughing.*] No. But I hugged her when I cried.

Bartram. Miss Winterton!

Alice. You've got lodging for me?

Charles. Lodging? Mother!

Bartram. At the inn near my own house. We have a mort o' guests, or my mother would rejoice to see you. But tomorrow they go, and my mother will beg you to come to us.

Charles. Are you here alone?

Alice. But not friendless when you're all so kind. Mary, may I have my cloak?

[*A knock, Right.*]

Mary. Who's that?

Bartram. Amos Winterton, I warrant ye.

Charles. [*To Alice.*] Your father?

Bartram. If you'd heard to me, mistress, we should have been safe away from here.

Alice. [*To Lamb.*] He'll be black with anger.

Charles. Into that room. [*Pointing, Left.*] Mary!

Bartram. [*To Mary.*] Hide her, mistress, hide her.

Alice. [*Recovering herself.*] No. I must see him.

[*Knock repeated. Lamb opens the door. Amos Winterton comes in. He is a short, puffy, ruddy*

man, in a traveling coat of many capes. He carries his riding whip.]

Charles. Come in, sir.

[*He rings. Dolly comes in, Left.*]

Winterton. [*Ignoring him. To Alice.*] So you're here.

Alice. Yes, father.

John. [*Glancing up.*] Do you know any games of solitaire?

Charles. [*To Dolly.*] A pot of porter.

[*Dolly goes out, Left.*]

Sit down, sir. We can laugh better, joke better, cry better, sitting, don't you think?

Winterton. [*To Alice.*] You're not married to this fellow yet—this Bartram?

Alice. [*Aghast.*] Married, father?

Charles. Sir, she's just come to London for a day's outing, ribbons, fallals. Don't spoil it.

Winterton. [*Turning on him.*] Be silent, sir.

Charles. I—I am. P-partly silent—when I st-st-stutter. Between the syllables.

Winterton. [*To Alice.*] You've run away with this fellow.

Alice. I ran away, and Mr. Bartram was kind to me. That was all.

Winterton. That was all, by God! She says that was all.

Bartram. And by God yourself! it was all.

Winterton. You were two days and a night on the road.

Alice. The coach broke down.

Winterton. Two days and a night and that's one night too many.

Alice. One night? What do you mean?

Charles. This is a child. There's an old story about offending little ones. Millstones hanged about the neck.

Winterton. [*Choking.*] Be silent, sir, with your blasphemy.

Charles. Sir, I can't be silent. I must applaud. For I've seen actors do the raging father on the stage. And you excel them, sir. By my faith, you do.

Winterton. Silence, sir.

[*Dolly comes in with the porter, Left. Lamb takes it and offers it to Winterton.*]

Charles. I beg of you. It cleanseth the bile, quieteth the spleen and causeth the choleric male to avoid those rashnesses that tempt stuttering London clerks to run them through—with the p-poker.

Mrs. Lamb. [*Warningly.*] Charles!

Charles. Mother, you don't know me as a man of war. I am a great fellow, a young David. I have had much poker practice while I sat over my books here from eight to twelve.

Dolly. Mr. Charles has a light hand at the fire.

Charles. [*Taking the poker from the jamb.*] In a duel there must be no unfair advantage. Dolly, the kitchen poker.

[*Dolly goes out, Left.*]

Alice. Father, let us go.

Winterton. Not till I know where I am to find this young libertine tomorrow morning.

Charles. You, Bartram. That means you. A surprising term to apply to a silversmith. Do you resent it? May I offer you the poker?

Winterton. [*To Bartram.*] Where am I to find you?

Bartram. [*Swelling with anger.*] You'll find me at father's shop, or wherever else you choose.

Winterton. Well said. Be ready for me at ten, tomorrow morning. We shall do whatever's right about a license, and you shall marry her.

Alice. Marry me!

Winterton. After that I'm off to Blakesware.

[*Dolly comes in with a poker.*]

Charles. [*To Winterton, taking the porter from the table and offering it.*] Fellow duelist, I beg you to refresh yourself. See how the foam has lowered.

Winterton. No, sir. Not in a house that harbors a runaway minx. [*To Alice.*] Put up your hair, you jade.

Charles. [*Setting the mug on the table.*] Gently, sir. Stutter like me, and it will help you think before you speak. I have often thought out an entire new set of commandments before I could say b-b-butter.

[*Takes the kitchen poker from Dolly, anxiously tests it and compares it with the other, Dolly following every movement.*]

Alice. I am ready, father.

Charles. Where are you taking her?

Winterton. To an inn, I tell you, and in the morning she marries this fellow that abducted her.

Alice. O father, no!

Bartram. Mr. Winterton, I am ready. I did not

abduct her, but if any fortune, good or evil, made me the husband of Alice Winterton I should be—a king.

Alice. No! no! Why, I had no thought of him in coming. I came to Mr. Lamb.

Winterton. Not Bartram? You came to Lamb? Charles Lamb? [*Laughs uncontrollably.*]

Mary. [*Indignantly.*] Why do you laugh?

Winterton. [*To Alice.*] Is it this Lamb you love?

Charles. Love! Oh, pearl in a swine's mouth!

Winterton. Charles Lamb, the grandson of the old housekeeper in Blakesware, Charles Lamb, the son of John Lamb, a body servant till his master died.

John. [*Looking up and then rising.*] Did any one call me? Did master call?

Mrs. Lamb. No, father, no.

Mary. My father *was* the friend and servant of a rich man.

John. Ay, master was a rich man. He used me well.

Mary. But if it had not been for my father's brains and loyalty the rich man would have been a poorer man, indeed.

Winterton. Charles Lamb, a broken-witted, stuttering clerk.

Alice. O father, you don't understand. I had hurt Mr. Lamb.

Winterton. Hurt him? What child's talk is this?

Mary. My brother ventured to love her.

Winterton. Love my daughter? Charles Lamb?

Mary. And your daughter had refused him.

Charles. Mary, we can't dwell upon these things.

My dear sir, I have chosen our weapon. The poker. I give you the advantage. I find the kitchen poker the larger and heavier of the two. Draw and defend yourself.

Winterton. The fellow's a fool.

Charles. T-take the p-poker. And I will p-poke the taker.

Winterton. [*To Alice.*] This is your Charles Lamb, is it? A clerk out of the East India House and a fool.

Charles. Permit me, sir. You are doubtless familiar with rapier practice, but poker practice is another thing. Again, I would seek no unfair advantage. [*Making passes at him.*] This is the assault upon the coals. Thus do we rake the fire.

Dolly. Lud, sir.

Charles. Thus do we gently titillate one coal upon another. Thus do we persuade the obdurate. And thus do we smash the coals when we would put the fire out. [*With sudden anger, raising the poker.*] Go, sir, go. Would you have me put your fire out?

Alice. Go, father. I'll meet you in the morning.

Winterton. Unless you come to-night you'll never meet me.

Bartram. You'd better go, mistress. These Lambs, if they'll excuse the liberty, are queer in the head.

Charles. Lamb's brains, he means—light, fit for nothing but—brain sauce.

Alice. I know them. Both their heads and hearts.

Charles. You hear, sir? Your daughter has a commendable taste in brain sauce. [*Putting down the pokers and sobering.*] All this has been a storm. My

foolish words are but sheet lightning. Go to your inn and remember your daughter is safe with us.

Winterton. [*To Alice.*] Get your cloak.

Alice. Father, give me your word you'll not marry me to any man.

Winterton. Your cloak. Put up your hair or I'll do it for you. [*Advances toward her.*]

Charles. [*With sudden fire.*] You'll not touch her.

Winterton. Who are you to say so?

Bartram. Yes. Who is he?

Charles. Charles Lamb. Clerk. Maker of poor verses and vile puns. But Charles Lamb in his own house is on his own dunghill, and he forbids you to frighten this poor bird lighted there. Mr. Winterton, it is late. If you would have stayed to have a smoke and a friendly glass and a talk about old books, you would have been welcome. But as it is, good night. [*Opens door, Right, and stands waiting.*]

Winterton. [*To Alice.*] Choose.

Alice. O father, I am afraid to go with you!

Charles. [*Getting a candle from the table and returning to the door.*] Let me hold the light, sir. Be careful of that step.

[*Winterton goes, angrily.*]

Alice. [*To Bartram.*] Will you take me to the inn?

Charles. Mother!

Mrs. Lamb. Mistress Winterton, we can give you a bed. You will be heartily welcome.

Alice. I am ashamed. My father has said such things about you all.

Charles. They were true things. I do stutter. I am a clerk.

Mrs. Lamb. [*To Alice.*] It is not fitting for you to be by yourself at an inn.

Bartram. You are right, ma'am, though I lose who should take her there.

Alice. [*Going up to peer from the window.*] It looks very dark.

Charles. It's not dark here, if you consent to stay.

Bartram. Mistress Winterton, I bid you good night. I will come tomorrow and learn your mind about going back to Blakesware.

Alice. My father doesn't want me there.

Charles. Don't think of that to-night. Mary, tell her she's not to think of it to-night. [*Opens the door, Right, and holds the candle.*] May I? Mind the step.

[*Bartram goes.*]

Mrs. Lamb. [*To Alice.*] Mary will give you a night rail.

John. [*To Alice.*] Madam, will you teach me a game of solitaire?

Alice. Gladly, sir. I'll teach you all I know. [*Sits opposite him at the card table.*]

[*Lamb stands looking at her in a happy dream.*]

Mary. Dolly, bring in the roast.

Dolly. 'Tis the soup comes first, ma'am.

Mary. Must I speak by the card?

[*Dolly goes out, Left.*]

How that girl can nettle me! Well, Charles, how like you your homecoming?

Charles. Why, Mary, 'tis not so much a homecoming to the old house as I had thought. 'Tis to a new Paradise.

THE SECOND ACT

Time: evening, a month later.
Scene: the same as in Act I. The rooms are brighter and more homelike. There are pots of flowers in the windows.
Lamb is running about, lighting candles.
Mary comes in, Left.

Mary. What are you doing?

Charles. Driving a coach and four across the African Desert. And if you dispute that, you contradictious hag, I'm lighting candles—all the candles in all the candlesticks, all the candles I could find and can't find candlesticks for. Mary, aren't there any old bottles I could stick candles in?

Mary. Yes, you dear simpleton, but they'd look like Tom o' Bedlam with straw in his hair. What are you celebrating?

Charles. [*Going busily on with his lighting and disposing the candles to advantage.*] Christmas, New Year's, Easter, St. Swithin's, St. George's—all the saints. And all the sinners. They'll be here presently. Hunt, Hazlitt, Manning.

Mary. [*Tenderly.*] Your're lighting up for Alice.

Charles. [*Suddenly sobered.*] We can't have Alice finding this old house a dungeon, a catacomb, a prison walled in by London fog.

Mary. She's not unhappy. She likes it here with us.

Charles. So the daffodils say while they're underground. But as soon as the sun lights on them, up they spring.

[*A knock, Right.*]

Who's there? Come in.

[*Hunt comes in, dressed gaily, in high spirits.*]

Hunt! I said daffodils, and behold, you. [*Goes to him, attitudinises in admiration and lays a dramatically timid finger on his coat.*] You are a garden "where roses and white lilies blow." Where do you get your clothes, man? In the Elysian fields? Look at mine. I bury 'em for a twelve-month, to ripen, and when I dig 'em up they're rotten as a pear.

Hunt. [*Having greeted Mary, opening a printed journal from under his arm.*] Charles, listen to this.

Charles. [*Drawing forward chairs.*] Come and have a pipe. I've left off smoking. [*Seats himself, luxuriously fills his pipe and begins to smoke.*]

Hunt. Listen. The Prince Regent—

Mary. [*Anxiously.*] The Regent? The Prince of Wales? You dare attack him again, and publicly?

Hunt. [*In high delight.*] I dare. Satire, seething, burning, biting satire. Published over my own name in the *Examiner,* my own review. Oh, I shall be in jail before the day is over.

Charles. [*Idly, enjoying his smoke.*] Bravo, my bully boy.

Hunt. [*To Lamb.*] You're in it, too. Here we are, large as life.

Charles. [*Amused.*] Not my verses on the Regent?

Hunt. The Prince of Whales.

Mary. [*Distressed.*] You've no right to print those verses. They were only to be read by Charles's friends.

Hunt. [*Ruefully.*] No man could resist 'em.

Mary. Get yourself into hot water, if you must, but not Charles.

Charles. [*With anticipatory relish.*] Read 'em out, Hunt. Read 'em out.

Hunt. [*Reads, in wild delight.*]

"Not a mightier whale than this
In the vast Atlantic is.
Not a fatter fish than he
Flounders round the Polar Sea.
See his blubbers! At his gills
What a world of drink he swills,
From his trunk, as from a spout—"

Mary. [*Impulsively, in her distress.*] Oh, I can't listen to it.

Charles. [*Lazily.*] Mary's such an old Tory.

Mary. No, I'm not. But sometime the Regent may be King George the Fourth. And Charles is in India House. He can't satirize a prince of the realm.

Charles. [*Pacifying her.*] The Regent won't know a satire from a satyr.

Mary. Ah, but you say the Prince of Whales.

Charles. He'll take it for a treatise on deep sea fish.

Hunt. [*Innocently.*] Oh, but remember the last verse. That tells all. Listen. [*Reads:*]

"By his bulk and by his size,
By his oily qualities,

This (or else my eyesight fails)
This should be the Prince of Whales."

Charles. [*Slapping his leg.*] They do read rather well, Mary.

Hunt. I'd rather have written them than anything within the last five years. Except my Prince Regent. I'm dashed proud of that. Listen. [*Reads.*] "The Regent, a corpulent man of fifty, a violator of his vow, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domesticities, a companion of gamblers and demi-reps." [*With huge delight.*] Oh, I shall be in jail before sundown tomorrow.

Mary. For shame! if you drag Charles in with you.

Charles. [*Chuckling.*] They do read rather well.

Hunt. Scissors, Mary? [*Finds them in her work-basket on the table.*] I'm going to cut my satire out and nail it up at my door so that all can see. [*Cuts industriously.*]

Mary. [*Still distressed.*] If they arrest you, why shouldn't they Charles?

Hunt. [*Cheerfully.*] We shall both be in jail, cheek by jowl, my boy, cheek by jowl.

Charles. I can't say the cheekiness of it makes it any the more jowlingly funny to me.

Mary. Charles can't go to jail.

Hunt. He's got to.

Charles. Yes, Mary. It won't come to me.

Mary. And mother helpless. And father as he is. And India House.

Hunt. Charles in jail will write some of the grandest poetry of the century. So shall I. "Stone walls do not a prison make."

Charles. They're the first steps to it, though.

Hunt. Stone walls! By gad, if I do get laid by the heels, I'll paper my walls with roses and put up a trellis over the door.

Mary. O Charles, those foolish verses!

Charles. They do read rather well.

Hunt. Yes, I lay two to one I shall be in jail before tomorrow night. Two to one. I lay two to one.

Charles. I wouldn't take you if you were a hen and laid two at a s-sitting.

Mary. Don't pin Charles's verses up at your door. Give them to me.

Hunt. Very well, Mary, very well. [*Snipping them out and handing them to her.*] But I lay two to one the constable will appear at this door before tomorrow is over and inquire for the author of the Prince of Whales.

Mary. O Charles! What can be done?

Charles. Nonsense, Mary. That's his talk. A hunt's up, that's all.

Hunt. [*Singing.*]

"The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well nigh day."

I'm dashed if I don't order my wall paper with the roses and butterflies now. Before they can lay hands on me.

Charles. By all the gods then, I wish we could run through my play before we go.

Hunt. What play?

Charles. A fragment, a play in a pint pot. The Dolls. I wrote it to make Alice laugh. Mary, too.

[*Tenderly.*] It's a red-letter day when I make Mary laugh.

Mary. You always can, Charles, except when things go contrary, as they're going now. [*Takes her sewing, looks it over, measures, etc., but does not sit down to it. She has a strained, uneasy air.*]

Charles. I meant to have you read it to us some night, you and Coleridge and Dyer. I couldn't, with my stuttering tongue.

Hunt. I'll assemble the clans. They're on the way, and Coleridge has probably pulled them up at a corner to hear him unriddle the universe. They shall be here in twenty minutes. We've no time to lose, my boy, for

[*Goes out singing, to the tune of "The Hunt Is Up":*]

"To prison we shall go!
To prison we shall go!
I'll call the clans with fife and drum
For to prison we shall go."

Mary. [*To Lamb.*] Do you wonder I'm wild with worry? No money but what you earn. Mother needing more care every day, father clamoring to be amused, and Dolly buzzing round me like a fly. And now this trick of Hunt's.

Charles. 'Tis a boy's trick, Mary.

Mary. Ah, but a boy's trick may throw you into jail.

Charles. Mary, I'm a poor, spindle-shanked, stuttering fellow, and I can't ride a horse nor shoot a gun. But I've got one piece of work and I'll do it.

Mary. What is it, Charles?

Charles. Hold these walls together, like a toy house I could lift in my hand.

Mary. You've held it together—so far.

Charles. If I have to go to jail for this folly of Hunt's, I'll go. But I'll write some devilish good stuff while I'm there, and I'll come out again.

Mary. There are such dangers round us. People wouldn't say there could be dangers about a quiet lodging like this. But it's as if there were fierce evil beasts at the door: poverty, illness and, O Charles! our wits, yours and mine, our queer uncertain wits.

Charles. That's it, Mary. Our wits. Well, if we were surrounded by wolves gnawing to get in, what should we do?

Mary. Bar the door?

Charles. That's what we'll do. We'll say the wolves are poverty, tired wits. We'll bar the door against them.

Mary. How can we bar it?

Charles. First wolf, Poverty. I keep on pegging away at India House. Second wolf—

Mary. Tired wits.

Charles. He's the head of the pack. I'll strangle him.

[*Mrs. Lamb comes in, Left.*]

Mrs. Lamb. Put away your work, Mary. You're sewing day and night now. It won't do.

Mary. [*Fretted.*] Don't tell me that, mother. How can I stop when a gown is promised? I couldn't sleep.

Mrs. Lamb. That's it. You don't sleep, you and

Charles. Plays, books, reading, talking! That's Charles. Sewing, reading, talking! That's you. O my children! no wonder you wear out your poor minds.

Charles. [*Gaily.*] Our minds are as bright as a new sixpence.

Mrs. Lamb. And your poor father—

Mary. Mother! mother! don't lament over us. That's what we can't bear.

Charles. Mary and I have a new medicine. It's courage. It's laughter. It's a merry heart.

Mrs. Lamb. Oh, I know I'm a hindrance to you.

Mary. Mother! mother! [*Goes to her, and puts an arm about her.*]

[*Charles puts an arm about her on the other side.*]

Charles. And mother! mother! A tablespoon of the new medicine, Mary's and mine. No work for Mary till tomorrow. No lamenting for mother till tomorrow. No puns for me—no smoking—I've left it off—no stuttering—nothing but a silly play and Alice and mother and Mary to laugh at it. Mary, avaunt! aroint thee, witch. Put your work away, run to your room and come back with a blue ribbon on.

[*He dances Mary about, and she laughs and kisses her mother, takes up her work from the table, folds it and goes out.*]

Mrs. Lamb. Charles, that young man was here again yesterday.

Charles. [*Quickly.*] Bartram?

Mrs. Lamb. Yes.

Charles. To see Alice?

Mrs. Lamb. Yes.

Charles. [*Recovering himself.*] That's only nat-

ural. I often look up at the figures on the Guildhall and think: You dolts! why don't you step down and come to see Alice?

Mrs. Lamb. You're bewitched by her. You go to your work later and later every morning.

Charles. [*Lightly.*] Ah, but I make up for it by coming away earlier and earlier in the afternoon.

Mrs. Lamb. Bartram, too, is bewitched. Only yesterday he brought his mother and sister to see her.

Charles. [*Seriously.*] That's a weather warning.

Mrs. Lamb. He's in earnest, I tell you.

Charles. Alice is a child. Mary says so.

Mrs. Lamb. She's growing older every day.

Charles. Is Alice growing up? Is she going to be a woman-Alice? an Alice that can be talked to about clerks in East India Houses? and wedding rings? I wonder.

Mrs. Lamb. Charles, my dear, I know what's in your mind.

Charles. Whatever it is, Alice is there in the midst of the rubbish, putting it in order. She'll be a good housekeeper, Alice will, when she realizes she's going to be perpetual tenant in my mind.

Mrs. Lamb. Some days you think you'll surely marry her.

Charles. Red-letter days, all the figures on the dial in red ink.

Mrs. Lamb. And some days you think because you lost courage and went to Hoxton Asylum, to get hold of yourself, you've no right to marry.

Charles. Not so much that, mother, as fear for

father, fear for Mary. Of their giving up and needing more than I can do.

Mrs. Lamb. Your father had the wits of ten, but with them a wandering will.

Charles. That's it, mother. The will! It must not wander. It must sit at home and rule the blood.

Mrs. Lamb. Oh, make her love you!

Charles. What am I, a poor stuttering clerk, to make the birds sing and the primroses bloom?

Mrs. Lamb. Remember Bartram. And his mother and sister urging her to visit them.

Charles. [*With a sudden whimsical outburst.*] Curses upon Bartram and his mother and sister and his ox and his ass and all that in them is.

[*Alice comes in, Left.*]

Alice. What is it, Mr. Lamb? Are you saying poetry?

Charles. I am pronouncing a verdict upon a young man who is presently going to find himself very much cut out, as much cut out as a silhouette on the wall, and as lonely.

Alice. [*Laughing.*] It sounded very solemn.

Charles. I borrowed it. Of a solemn book. We don't use borrowed articles with ease.

Mrs. Lamb. Where's Mary?

Alice. Lying down in her room.

Charles. [*Alarmed.*] Not well?

Mrs. Lamb. I'll go to her.

Alice. I think, Mrs. Lamb, if you please, she wants to collect herself alone.

Mrs. Lamb. Nay, I'll go to her.

[*She goes out, Left.*]

Charles. Mary's ill?

Alice. She's worried about Mr. Hunt's printing your poem on the Prince of Wales.

Charles. Whales, Alice! [*Chuckling irrepressibly.*] It didn't read so badly.

Alice. Mary works very hard.

Charles. You help her.

Alice. Of course I do. And your father's wanting her to play solitaire, and your mother's being so helpless.

Charles. I know, I know. Mary's mother to us all. Alice!

Alice. Yes, Mr. Lamb.

Charles. It doesn't seem to you as if Mary's head being confused meant—anything we should hate to have it mean?

Alice. She's tired, Mr. Lamb.

[*A knock, Right.*]

Charles. Ah, there's my troupe of players.

Alice. I'll ask your mother to come away with me. When Mary is tired, she can ill bear those she loves most—except you, Mr. Lamb.

[*She goes out, Left. Lamb goes to the door and admits Hunt, Coleridge, and Manning.*]

Hunt. Dyer's on the way. He ran against a gate post and stopped to beg pardon, taking it for a lady.

Charles. So here you are. To present the most farcical comedy of The Dolls. [*Goes to the bookshelves and takes down a pile of prompt books.*]

Coleridge. [*Always majestically.*] We are to act? Is that wisely conceived? I am not aware of any overwhelming ability of my own in that art.

[*Dyer comes in, Right, dazed and timorous.*]

Dyer. I have had a most unpleasant experience. Some one ran into me, and, despite my apologies, profuse, I assure you, profuse, the lady—I am sure it was a lady—remained absolutely dumb.

[*Hazlitt enters, intent and anxious.*]

Hazlitt. Hunt beckoned at my window. Not ill, are you, Charles? Nor Mary?

Charles. 'Tis a play, Hazlitt, and you're to act in it.

Hazlitt. No! no! I'll paint your portrait, I'll disembowel your play. But act in it—no! no!

Coleridge. As to authoritative pronouncement upon the drama, in that I, too, am an adept. Manning here has, as you know, the gift of mimicry. Let him read your comedy, taking all parts in turn.

Dyer. [*Apprehensively.*] Lamb, have you written a comedy?

Coleridge. We are summoned to take part in it. [*To Lamb.*] Disclose your most excellent reason.

Charles. This it is. Mistress Alice Winterton, in descending from her native skies and alighting in our dark delicious London, has left behind her not only the Pleiades and Orion but her dolls. For the said Mistress Alice, though a tall maid and sedate, is but a child at heart. And we, being London lovers and Alice lovers, must lighten for her the darkness of our low skies, and therefore have I composed the most moving comedy of The Dolls and writ out the parts fair and large.

Coleridge. [*Swelling slightly with dignified resentment.*] You have writ out parts for us—for me—to play?

Dyer. [*Nervously.*] I have never acted upon any stage. I misdoubt me but I should make a failure of it.

Charles. Tilly vally, my brave lad! tilly vally!

[*Claps him on the back, and Dyer, momentarily dislocated, smiles and goes to the bookcase, takes a book and is at once absorbed.*]

Manning. [*Hopefully.*] I love a play, and if I can get inside it I'm made. But why not have it acted in a proper theatre by a proper company?

Hazlitt. Anything less is desecration.

Charles. I tell you, it has but one single purpose—to make Alice laugh. And Mary. A laugh from Mary is worth a ship from the spice islands, loaded to the rail.

Manning. But a proper theatre, I say, a proper company.

Charles. 'Twas writ for an improper theatre—this room, and this most indubitably improper company. Therein do we conjure up a laugh. Coleridge, here's your part. [*Gives it to him.*] You are Sophronia Simplex.

Coleridge. I, a doll?—a female doll? Lamb, I tell you most succinctly, *in extenso,* I refuse.

Charles. [*Impishly.*] Oh no, Coleridge, no. You can't refuse. It's to make Alice laugh. And Mary.

[*John Lamb comes in and goes to his table where he spreads his cards, with an air of fussy importance, and begins his game of solitaire.*]

I am not sure but father will laugh, too. We'll shout the ceiling down and let in the stars to speak the epilogue.

John. [*Absently, and always fussily busy.*] What's that, Charles? Split the roof with laughter? We used to do that in my young days, if I remember.

Charles. [*Running over his little handful of prompt books.*] Dyer, you are the Widow Welcome, with an eye to a third match.

Dyer. [*Looking up from his book only to return to it at once.*] I won't do it, Lamb. I, a widow? I've not been a wife.

Lamb. Hunt, here's yours.

Hunt. [*Taking it and reading with delighted interest.*] Oh, bravo! I'm the Lonesome Lilypad, the doll that persuades the others to follow Alice to London.

Charles. Yours, Manning. You're Mistress Mushroom Stem, housekeeper in the new palace the dolls build for Alice.

Manning. Any chance for making faces? I do prodigiously love a comical face. [*He begins earnestly practising them.*]

Coleridge. I protest, I will have nothing to do with it, nothing.

Charles. Then you'll spoil the play and the ceiling won't crack, and we sha'n't have the stars in to say the epilogue, and Mary won't laugh and Alice will cry and dissolve like a sugar loaf in her own sweetness.

Manning. [*To Coleridge.*] Oh, come along with you, Coleridge. Any man may make a fool of himself for an evening and be none the worse. Make a face with me. 'Tis an excellent limber for the mind set on its own dignity.

Lamb. [*Drawing up a large chair and setting it in the Back, Centre.*] Alice is sitting here.

Dyer. [*Looking up from his book.*] 'Tis an empty chair.

Charles. Sapient conclusion! Yet in that chair will Alice sit.

Hunt. Bring your Alice in and let her laugh now if she is to laugh, for before tomorrow noon you and I shall be betwixt four walls meditating on the Regent and the Prince of Whales.

Charles. True, most excellent satirist, true. [*Going to the door, Left.*] Hillyho, Mary! Come and bring Alice with you, and Dolly, if she loves the arts. The curtain is about to rise.

[*Mary comes in, Left.*]

Mary. On what, Charles?

Charles. A play, my dear. By Master William Shakespeare, dug up in an old pint pot near the Mermaid Tavern and regilded by one Charles Lamb.

[*Alice and Mrs. Lamb come in, Left.*]

It is called The Dolls.

Alice. [*With quick interest.*] Is it about dolls?

Charles. Yes, my Lady Daffodil.

Alice. And do these gentlemen set forth the argument?

Charles. These gentlemen are the argument. They are the dolls.

Mary. Charles, you are a simpleton.

Charles. [*Indicating the chair Back Centre.*] Alice, you are to sit here.

Alice. [*Drawing back.*] Oh, but your mother!

Charles. Mother and Mary sit here. [*Indicating seats at the side.*]

[*Alice, Mary and Mrs. Lamb sit.*]

[*To Alice.*] The dolls address you. They are heart-broken because you ran away to London, and they have built you a beautiful palace, with walls of sugar and a sherry moat, and they come to beg you to live in it forever, forsaking earthly care. [*Calls.*] Sophronia Simplex. [*Coleridge does not move.*] Coleridge, the stage waits.

Coleridge. I utterly refuse.

Charles. Coleridge, 'tis a part that will make or break you. Do you not wish to be made? Sophronia is a maid. Be you one and address yourself to Alice.

Coleridge. I will not.

Alice. O Mr. Coleridge!

Coleridge. [*Unwillingly.*] So be it then. [*Recites in a hollow voice:*]

I am a maiden most forlorn.
My trembling heart is tried and torn
By lack of her, my lady fair,
My mistress of the golden hair—

Charles. Advance, Coleridge, advance.

[*Coleridge shambles awkwardly forward.*]

No, no, not that gait. I must deliver a discourse upon doll locomotion. A doll is painfully hampered by ineffective joints. She is stiffened, not by gout but congenitally. 'Twas the way she was born, poor soul.

Alice. Oh, but a dolly's arms will move.

Charles. After a fashion. Thus. And their legs. Thus, Coleridge, thus. [*He illustrates with the upper arms flat at the side, the forearm moving by wooden jerks and the legs absurdly stiff.*]

Mary. And what are you, Charles? A doll?

Charles. I am Jack-in-a-Box. It is I that have

spirited Alice away. But she won't promise to live with me in my box, and I keep jumping up out of it to show her what a commodious box it is. This way, do you see. [*He does a jack-in-a-box leap, throwing his legs apart and bringing his hands together, arms straight, over his head. Alice laughs. Lamb is transfixed. He cries out in a crow of delight.*] By God! Alice is laughing. You, too, Mary, you, too!

[*Mary laughs indulgently.*]

Now, Coleridge, advance, doll's walk. This way. Thus.

Alice. Oh, please, Mr. Coleridge.

Coleridge. [*Majestically practising.*] I almost have it. 'Tis a pleasant conception this moving without a complexity of joints. Possibly one might more easily attain the method by counting. One—two. One—two.

[*Alice, Mary and Mrs. Lamb burst into laughter. John Lamb joins them, not looking up and continuing his game.*]

Alice. O Mr. Coleridge! you look so funny.

Coleridge. [*Hurt.*] Funny, ma'am, funny?

Charles. Don't confuse him, Alice. He's not funny. Not yet. We are all going to be a great deal funnier before we get through. Dyer, where are you?

[*Dyer, now absorbed in his book, comes forward dreamily.*]

Dyer. Where did you come on this edition? Priceless. Priceless.

Charles. Doll's march, man. Put out your foot. So. So. [*Arranges his arms stiffly, lifts his foot and puts it down, to illustrate.*] Now the other. Left—right. Left—right.

Coleridge. [*Solemnly illustrating.*] One—two. One —two.

Manning. Come, Dyer. Bustle. Bustle. If we're to make fools of ourselves we must do it gamesomely.

Charles. [*Consulting his book.*] Hazlitt, your cue.

Hazlitt. [*Reading with a determined dignity.*]

We are the dolls you left behind
When toward the town you turned your mind.
Our hearts with woe were like to burst.
We could but think how long you'd nursed
Our daily ills and washed our faces—

Mary. You can't wash dolls' faces.

Alice. No, indeed. The color comes off.

Charles. Women, be silent. 'Tis poetic license and you don't know it. Faces, Hazlitt, faces.

Hazlitt.

And washed our faces
And trimmed our hats and tied our laces.

Manning. [*With unction and eloquent facial expression.*]

And you had left us all forlorn
And, on a now embittered morn,
Gone up to London. So we rose,
Dear Lady Alice, donned our clothes—

Coleridge. Charles, I protest. Clothes never rhymes with rose.

Charles. Poetic license. Get along, Hazlitt.

Hazlitt. [*Who has lost his place.*]

And came—and came—
But now we find you quite the same—

Charles. My cue.

With hair so bright and eyes so blue,
With heart so warm and soul so true—

Mary. You've taken the best lines for yourself, bad as they are.

Charles. Don't throw me off the track or I shall begin to st-stutter. Dyer, your cue.

Dyer. [*Agitatedly closing his book, keeping the place in it with his finger and shuffling the leaves of his prompt book.*] Where am I? Oh!

Who comes? Who knocks?

Charles. I am Sir Fool, the Jack-in-a-Box.

Mary. Where's your box?

Charles. [*Hopefully.*] Oh, we'll rig something. [*In bright discovery.*] No, by Terpsichore and her dancing feet! I don't need a box. I am worked by a string. [*He takes the scissors from Mary's work-basket on the table, cuts the bell rope, ties one end of it to his upper waistcoat button and forces the other end on Manning.*] Jerk it. Lightly, so.

[*Manning jerks the cord and, at each jerk, Lamb does the spasmodic stunt of the Jack-in-a-Box, throwing his hands above his head and spreading his legs. Everybody gives way to fits of laughter, all but Dyer who, absorbed in his book, goes on doll-stepping about the room, bumping into things, recovering and saying, with an awkward bow, "Madam, I beg your pardon."*]

[*Stopping, suddenly, breathless, at a thought.*] I must have a box. I live in my box, and I beg Alice

to reject the doll palace the rest of you offer her and live with me.

Hazlitt. Ah, there's the flaw.

Coleridge. [*Ponderously.*] I agree with you, Hazlitt. Drama must be founded on truth.

Hazlitt. You ask her to come and live in your box. In the box of a Jack-in-the-Box there is room for one only. This is no comedy. It is tragedy predetermined.

Charles. [*Suddenly smitten to seriousness.*] Alice, do you hear? No room for two.

Hunt. [*Hopefully.*] It sha'n't be tragedy. It shall be comedy. It shall be played—it shall be historic—

Coleridge. Are we not all, in our own proper persons, fated to become historic? If I foresee the future, some of us are destined to figure in golden script on England's deathless page.

Charles. I shall write for—antiquity.

Hunt. [*Dancing about with impatience.*] Now I ask you who is the most seething, sizzling comedy figure of our day?

Charles. [*Pointing at Dyer.*] George Dyer.

Hunt. Not he. Another George, he who is hopefully existing to become George IV.

Charles. Oh, your Prince Regent! You've the Prince Regent on the brain. If it were a wen of that size you'd be in Paul's Churchyard.

Hunt. To play the Regent. O excellent fancy! Abandon these puppets, Charles, and I'll give you a living demonstration of what he would be on this or any stage. You will be thrilled at my impersonation, and we'll go home and you shall write a play about it. Mary, give me that cushion.

[*She tosses him a cushion from the sofa. He snatches the cord from Lamb's button, ties the cushion deftly on himself for a stomach and struts.*]

Am I not great? great in rank and great of paunch? Am I not an indubitable Regent, a true Prince?

[*A knock, Right. They stiffen, each in his place, all but Dyer, who continues doll-stepping.*]

A Voice Without. In the King's name!

[*Lamb goes to the door and throws it open, peering. The constable enters, a small, pompous fellow with a lantern.*]

Constable. Is this the residence of one Charles Lamb, who has recently written a squib on His Highness the Regent, otherwise the Prince of Wales?

[*Mary takes the scissors from her basket, cuts the cord about Hunt's waist, tosses it into a chair and throws the cushion over it.*]

Charles. [*With an impish courtesy.*] This is the humble residence of one Jack, formerly of the Box, a poor player, sir, who is rehearsing his most arduous calling. Thus, sir, thus. [*He begins to do his Jack-in-a-Box trick. In flinging himself about the room, he nears Hunt. To him, aside:*] Out of the door.

[*The others doll-step about Hunt and shuffle him to the door, Right. He slips away and they close the door.*]

Constable. [*To Lamb.*] Have you written a set of scurrilous verses upon the Prince of Wales?

Charles. Sir, I tell you I am but a poor player.

Constable. You are the boon companion of Leigh Hunt. I am informed he is here. Which is he?

Charles. I give you my word of honor, sir, the honor of a poor player, that he is not here.

Constable. Do you know the man?

Charles. Sir, I know him well.

Constable. I was told I should find him here.

Charles. Sir, he has been here, but he is not here now. He is a gentleman who, like a juggler's rabbit in a hat, has a vanishing quality most disconcerting to the observer. Even if he were here but a moment ago, he might now be in the Fortunate Isles.

Constable. [*Taking a paper from his hat and painfully making a note on it.*] The Fortunate Isles. [*Helplessly.*] I have a warrant for him.

Charles. [*Consolingly.*] Keep it, sir. 'Tis of small consequence. 'Twill not overweight you.

Constable. Then, sir, if this Hunt has escaped me, temporarily, but temporarily, I insist upon knowing which of you is Mr. Lamb.

John Lamb. [*Rising and coming forward.*] Did you call me, sir?

Charles. No, father. Go back to your game. [*To the constable.*] I, sir, for lack of a better to carry on my father's virtues, am Charles Lamb.

[*Mrs. Lamb goes to John and leads him out, Left.*]

Constable. Author of the Prince of—[*Consults his notes.*] Whales, sir, that is it. Whales.

Charles. Sir, I rejoice to father it. I would my father could be as rejoiced to father me. The whale! no fish is longer or broader in the beam, or heavier or stronger. They tell us there are as good fish in the sea as were ever taken out of it. But none so big, I warrant ye.

Constable. You may say what you like, sir, but whatever your business is, 'tis no part of it to name the Regent the Prince of Whales.

Charles. What could be more majestic? Consider the leviathan. I commend you, sir, to the Book of Job, wherein his powers are most explicitly set forth. He giveth out oil for the lighting of the world. Even his bones are beneficent. They are the stay of the feminine soul. [*Aside, to Mary.*] Stays, Mary, whalebone, stays. Rather good, that. [*To the constable.*] And when he rots under disease, he ripens into ambergris, and the excellent smell thereof penetrates to the uttermost parts of the earth and the Queen of Sheba is blown to Solomon on the wings thereof.

Constable. You confuse me with words. In the name o' God, which o' you is Charles Lamb?

Coleridge. [*Stepping majestically forward.*] The question of identity, sir, is of abysmal depth, but if it be a question of arresting Charles Lamb, I assert without qualification that I am he.

Manning. [*With a series of frightful faces.*] Nay, nay, sir; this is an impostor. I am Charles Lamb myself.

Constable. [*With passion.*] Which of ye is Charles Lamb?

Dyer. [*Catching on.*] I, sir, I, I, I.

Hazlitt. [*To Constable.*] You little hop-o'-my-thumb! do you call for Charles Lamb? Behold me! I am he.

Charles. Why, 'tis a flock of lambs. Wilt be our shepherd, sir? My friends would fain save me from the noose o' the law. But what constitutes a Lamb?

If it be to go sheepishly to the East India House at ten of a morning, I am that Lamb. If it be to lead a life of pipes and mugs and pen and paper, I am that Lamb. If it be to swim in seas of ink, I am that Lamb. If it be to play the part of Jack in the uproarious comedy where you shall now join us, I am that Lamb. And you, sir, you are the gravy, the fat to be done presently to a toothsome crispness, and you shall melt under the warmth of our cherishing and join us in the Dolls' March.

[*They join hands and doll-step about him, convoying him to the door. He points a finger at Lamb as they turn him about and splutters:*]

Constable. [*To Lamb.*] They may be Lambs, but 'tis you are the bell wether. I give ye warning, though you be too much for me to-night I will return at dawn with five stout fellows sprightlier than any dozen lambs among ye, and butchers all.

[*They bundle him out, and Manning shoots the bolt. They look at one another breathlessly and laugh in a gasping chorus.*]

Coleridge. Faith, 'twas excellent fooling.

Dyer. Was it fooling? Was that why we all called ourselves Lambs?

Mary. [*Coming down and speaking with a determined quiet.*] Charles, my head. Confused.

Charles. [*With a quick look at her, taking her hand. To his friends, in a voice of warning:*] Not a word more. The evening's over. Mary's tired. You see?

Manning. [*Quietly.*] We'll be on our way. Good night, Mistress Winterton. Coleridge! Dyer, here's your scarf. We're off. [*Impatiently to Dyer, who re-*

gards the dangling scarf helplessly.] There, 'tis not a halter. Your scarf, man, your scarf.

[*They troop out silently, and Alice comes down, perplexed, and tries to take Mary's hand. Mary looks at her in an unrecognizing gaze, and Alice shrinks back.*]

Charles. [*To Alice, with quiet authority.*] To bed, Alice, and dream of dolls.

Alice. I won't leave you.

Charles. [*With decision.*] You must. Good night.

Alice. Good night. [*Timidly.*] Good night, Mary.

[*Mary does not answer. Alice goes lingeringly out.*]

Charles. [*Holding Mary's hand and looking at her steadily with eyes of comforting love.*] Mary, you believe me, don't you?

Mary. [*Like a child.*] Yes, Charles.

Charles. Your mind is tired. You have had too many worries. I thought if we played the fool it would make you laugh.

Mary. It did. But when I found you must go to jail, I was afraid.

Charles. If I go I shall come back again.

Mary. [*Submissively.*] Yes, Charles.

Charles. When I went to Hoxton, I was tired, as you are. My brain was confused, like yours.

Mary. Yes, Charles. But when my brain is confused, a terror comes up in me because I do not know what I shall do. Sometimes I am afraid I shall strike, not knowing where.

Charles. Learn this. We must govern our brains. We must think of what is quiet, what is still. I said

to myself at Hoxton, what shall I think of to rest my mind? London? No, London is full of turmoil. The mountains? No, they are bleak and cold. My books? No, books are sad sometimes.

Mary. [*Timidly.*] What did you think of, Charles?

Charles. [*Reverently.*] I thought of God. That is what we must do. We must say his name over and over to our tired minds.

Mary. [*Anxiously.*] If I forget, will you say it for me?

Charles. I'll say it for you. Now you shall lie down here until you're sleepy. Then you'll go to bed and I'll keep watch. If you call, I'll come. The least whisper—I will come.

[*He takes her to the couch, and she lies down and as he covers her*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

THE THIRD ACT

Time: the next morning.
Scene: the same, except that the room has been put in order and the breakfast table is partly set.
Alice comes in, Left, and glances about the room.
Lamb comes in, Left, goes to her and takes her hands.
[*She looks at him earnestly.*]

Alice. You've not slept.

Charles. No. But Mary's sleeping.

Alice. Go to bed now and let me watch.

Charles. No. The constable may come back. Mary shall not see him.

Alice. Mr. Lamb, must you go to jail?

Charles. [*Absently.*] Very likely. I have been a fool and I must pay.

Alice. I will take care of Mary. We'll live somehow.

Charles. Ah, my Lady Daffodil! How should you guess what you are promising? Do you know what my life is to be?

Alice. You are giving it to Mary.

Charles. I've given it to her. Mary's mind is like a runaway horse. It bolts without warning. Mary is worn out with worry, worn out with fear. So I must sit beside her in the driver's seat, ready to lay my hand on the reins.

Alice. [*Whimsically.*] Let me sit behind and watch the landscape and tell you and Mary when I see a primrose or a hawthorn hedge in bloom.

Charles. Such a life for a child!

Alice. Mr. Lamb, you need me.

Charles. God knows that. And you're not afraid of us, Mary and me, driving her runaway so fast?

Alice. No! no! because you're not afraid.

Charles. Ah, that's it—not to be afraid of anything, poverty, work, a tired head. When Mary learns that, it will all be different.

[*Mary comes in, Left, looking dazed and languid.*]

Mary. I believe I've been asleep.

Charles. [*Going to her.*] So you have, my dear.

Mary. I feel almost quite myself. [*Wistfully.*] Almost, Charles!

Charles. And now's the moment for a cup of tea. Dolly shall bring it.

Mary. You'll think I'm silly, but Dolly undoes me.

Charles. That kitchen wench?

Mary. She buzzes about me like a fly. If I ask her to scour the pewter she brings me every separate piece and bids me praise it. This table now. [*She goes to the breakfast table and disposes the articles on it differently.*] This plate. I use it in the oven. And to cut the bread, this thin sharp knife I keep so precious.

Charles. Tell her, Mary, tell the wench.

Mary. I do. I do. And then she does it over again. Not to spite me. Oh, no! but it does spite me.

Charles. Get rid of her.

Mary. No. She's good to father.

Charles. Run back into your bedroom. She shall bring the tea and then I'll call you.

[*He takes Mary to the door, Left, and she goes out.*]

Alice. [*Who has got up on a chair and tied the bell cord.*] Dolly does fret her.

Charles. [*Decisively.*] I'll pack the girl off without shrift. I'll quarter her and cast her to the four winds. [*He rings.*]

[*Dolly comes in, Left.*]

Dolly, get me a pint of porter.

Dolly. Yes, sir.

Charles. Hear me, Dolly. Not at the nearest public house. The sixth one you count from here.

Dolly. Yes, sir.

[*She goes out, Left.*]

Charles. That gives us a breathing spell. Alice, what if we take Mary out into the country?

Alice. Oh, yes, yes! A day in the country and even Dolly would look different.

Charles. [*Going to the window.*] It's going to be a sweet day, a primrose, violet, hawthorn day.

Alice. [*Wistfully.*] There's not much sunshine.

Charles. What's all this talk about the sun? A great blowsy, rude, insolent fellow, round as Falstaff and so cocky he's shined himself up till you can't look at him without having your eyes put out. The only decent thing about him is he sometimes knows his place. He's shy about peeping into London where there are so many better chaps than he.

Alice. You love London.

Charles. She was my first love. Alice, what should you say to London for the scene of a little talk about marriage?

Alice. For a play?

Charles. No, my dear, not for a play. Ah, but—how is the doll?

Alice. Very well, I hope. I haven't seen her since I left Blakesware. I don't miss her here.

Charles. You don't miss her? By God! Oh, I've been jealous of that painted image. Why don't you miss her?

Alice. It's so pleasant here. And you're all so good to me, your mother, and Mary, and Mr. Bartram coming in.

Charles. Alice, beware of Bartram.

Alice. Why, Mr. Lamb?

Charles. Because he is seven feet high of the stature of Goliath. Because he has a merry face and a strong arm and the heart of a maiden may safely trust in him. Set up before yourself other gods. Learn to look with favor upon spindle shanks and a stuttering tongue. But I shall never stammer over your name, Alice. It comes like oil to my lips, yea, oil from the gardens where sweet spices grow.

Alice. Oh, we're going to have a beautiful time on our walk.

Charles. Who told you that?

Alice. I know. This is one of your talking days.

Charles. Do I talk?

Alice. Not like Mr. Coleridge. But he's a minister.

Charles. Yes.

Alice. I never heard him preach.

Charles. I never heard him do anything else.

[*Dolly comes in, breathless, Left, carrying a mug of porter.*]

Dolly. The porter, sir.

Charles. I told you to go to the antipodes for it.

Dolly. Yes, sir. But you're always in a hurry and I ran.

Charles. [*To Alice.*] Will you? [*She refuses.*] "Drink to me only with thine eyes." [*He drinks.*] Dolly, I must send you on another errand. To Mr. Bartram's.

Dolly. Yes, sir.

Charles. You shall go to his shop, and you shall ask for young Mr. Bartram. And you shall say this to him: "Be it known to you, sir, that Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House has this day a holiday, and he has gone into the country, taking with him Miss Alice Winterton to listen to the larks composing their epithalamiums extempore."

Dolly. Lud, sir! I never can get out that word.

Charles. Never mind. Do your best with it, as the conduit does with Thames.

Alice. What is an epithalamium?

Charles. It is a marriage song, Alice, and the larks make it in heaven. Dolly, attend. You shall say this to him. Mr. Charles Lamb died this morning, piously rescuing a child from a burning building, just after the decease of Miss Alice Winterton, who had lived only long enough to close the eyes of Mr. Coleridge and Miss Mary Lamb, who died of grief of the death of Dolly Vane.

Dolly. La, sir. You'd have me dead. [*Relieved.*] 'Tis one of your jokes.

Charles. Nothing, tell him, has ever exceeded the heroism of the death of Mr. Charles Lamb. He is to be interred in the Abbey. There will be an inscription to him, setting forth his incomparable virtues. No, Dolly, no. Just run to Mr. Bartram, and say we're going into the country.

Dolly. Where is his shop, sir?

Charles. London Bridge, if it's not fallen down, and then the third turning to the right.

Dolly. Will I take a bus, sir?

Charles. No, girl, no. A buss? What query is this for a modest maid?

[*Dolly goes out, Right.*]

Alice. The Bartrams are not at London Bridge.

Charles. No. I've sent her far afield. She'll find no such place and before she comes back we shall be gone and Mary needn't see her hated phiz till night.

Alice. I'll tell Mary we're to go. [*Listening at the door.*] Your mother is with her. They're talking.

Charles. Come back. Does it ever seem to you that it's very cosy, you and I here in these old rooms and getting into a kind of pretty intimacy?

Alice. Like you and Mary.

Charles. No. You're not like Mary.

Alice. Nobody could be. Mr. Lamb, shall I stay here always?

Charles. Why not? We'll drink ale, and talk, and live poetry and write prose, and you and Mary and I'll die together and cover each other with leaves in Covent Garden.

Alice. You must forgive me if I laugh too much.

Charles. Should a bird crave pardon if it came in here and sang?

Alice. You make me laugh, you're so gay. But when I think about what I shall do, it's then I get the vapours. I talk to Mary about it.

Charles. What does Mary say?

Alice. She says: Stay with us till you're grown up.

Charles. Ah, good Mary! wise, kind sister!

Alice. Then I ask her, "When shall I be grown up?" And she says, "You'll know. Somebody'll tell you. And if you like to hear him, you'll learn many things."

Charles. Alice, when you're really grown up, I want to be the one to tell you.

Alice. I'd like it to be you.

Charles. But, without waiting for the sun and the birds, here in these dark old lodgings, I tell you, Alice, the minute is coming when I shall turn to your blue eyes and see the woman look.

Alice. Perhaps I am a woman now. Old enough to work.

Charles. Old enough to let a man work for you. Alice, I'll tell you how my heart stands toward you.

Alice. Need you, Mr. Lamb?

Charles. Does it frighten you, as it did before?

Alice. No, Mr. Lamb, I'm not frightened.

Charles. After I had been to Hoxton, I knew you were right not to love me. I found I was a poor jangled fellow, and I said the things other men have are not for me.

Alice. Everything ought to be for you. You are the best, the bravest—

Charles. I came home. I found you here. I knew, whatever happened to me, I should never let my wits get muddled again.

Alice. They never will.

Charles. I am as fit as any man to ask a woman to be my wife. I am in my perfect mind. And I will to stay there.

Alice. [*Eagerly.*] I can help you.

Charles. We are queer, we Lambs. We've had great anxieties. Our minds work day and night, like mill wheels. But the mill wheel grinds the grist.

Alice. I like you better than any people in the whole world.

Charles. You know the worst of us. And when good careful old Mary says you're a woman—

Alice. [*Entreatingly.*] Let me wait a little.

Charles. Till you're a woman. And till then, stay with us.

[*He takes her hands and they look at each other.*]

Alice. [*Impulsively.*] I will stay with you.

Charles. Alice! [*He draws her to him.*]

[*A knock.*]

Who's there?

[*Bartram comes in, Right.*]

The devil! [*Drops her hands.*]

Bartram. The devil, sir? No, sir! no, sir!

Charles. [*Recovering himself.*] Not the devil, but our good Bartram. You've come prematurely, sir. This is not your cue. [*To Alice.*] See if Mary is ready.

[*Alice goes out, Left.*]

Bartram. You sent me a message.

Charles. Ah, Bartram, if I did, it was like the Lord's prayer backward, to keep you away, not to bid you come.

Bartram. I met your maid out here, running, head down, and she told me she was sent to inform me you were taking Alice Winterton out of London.

Charles. Now curses on that marplot, that chattering jade. She ought to be running over London in wrong directions like water up hill, asking for your shop and finding it not.

Bartram. And I had this to say to you, Mr. Lamb. If you are taking Alice out of town I want to know whither. Is it to Blakesware?

Charles. No, Romeo. Only for a country walk, to hear the larks.

Bartram. You'll bring her back again?

Charles. Most preciously. Like a consignment of matched pearls.

Bartram. Because, Mr. Lamb, nothing must be done without my knowledge.

Charles. You are modest, Mr. Bartram.

Bartram. I want to propose for her now, in marriage, you understand. I propose for her.

Charles. [*Hastily.*] Not to me. I'm not her guardian.

Bartram. She treats you like a guardian.

Charles. No! no! quite different.

Bartram. My mother and sisters are anxious to receive her.

Charles. My mother and sister are agonizing to keep her here.

Bartram. [*Imploringly.*] Mr. Lamb, won't you stand by me?

Charles. I'm not a bystander. I am in the game.

[*Alice comes in, Left, John Lamb following.*]

Alice. Mr. Lamb, we must give up the walk. Mary's head is still confused.

[*Mary comes in.*]

John. [*To Bartram.*] Sir, will you watch a game of solitaire?

Bartram. Not this morning, sir.

Mary. [*To Lamb.*] Charles, I mustn't go. I don't know what I might do.

Alice. Sit down here, Mary.

Mary. [*Resisting her.*] There are strange thoughts in my mind.

Alice. Mary, dear!

Charles. [*Snapping his fingers in the air.*] There go the hateful thoughts. I've conjured 'em away.

Mary. [*To Lamb.*] Something is going to happen. If it should be the worst that could happen, you'd save me?

Charles. I'd save you, Mary.

Mary. I have sudden rages against the innocent. I don't know what I may do.

John. [*Looking up from his board.*] No wits like the Lamb wits, so light they're off like smoke before you know it.

Mary. [*Brooding.*] I don't know what I may do.

[*Mrs. Lamb comes in, Left.*]

Mrs. Lamb. Mary, what's the matter?

Mary. Don't speak to me.

Charles. [*Rapidly, in alarm.*] Alice!

Alice. Yes, Mr. Lamb.

Charles. Put on your cloak. Bartram will take you home with him.

Bartram. Come, Miss Winterton.

Alice. Leave Mary while she needs me? No!

Charles. Go with Bartram. Don't come back here until I send for you.

Alice. I'm not afraid. See! [*Puts her arm about Mary.*] Mary, dear.

Mary. Don't speak to me.

[*Lamb pulls Alice away.*]

Charles. [*To Bartram.*] Take her away.

Bartram. Come.

Mrs. Lamb. What's all this pother because Mary's tired? Mary, go to your room again and lie down quietly.

Mary. [*To Lamb.*] I'm afraid to be alone.

Charles. Go to your room. I'll come to you.

[*Dolly comes in.*]

Dolly. O Mr. Lamb! I found Mr. Bartram and I told him you sent me and he said he'd come and so I had time to spare and I went and got Miss Mary the reel of thread she sent me for yesterday and here it is. Miss Mary! Miss Mary! look at the thread I brought you.

[*Mary seizes the knife from the table and runs at Dolly. Mrs. Lamb rises from her chair and*

interposes. Mary strikes her with the knife and Mrs. Lamb falls.]

John. [*Looking up, in a mild amusement.*] Blind man's buff!

[*Mary stands looking at her mother an instant, drops the knife and shrieks. She runs to Charles.*]

Mary. Charles! what have I done?

Charles. [*Holding her to him and pressing her face to his shoulder.*] Nothing. Don't look. Alice, go. Bartram, take her away.

Alice. [*Kneels beside Mrs. Lamb and feels her heart.*] O Charles, she doesn't breathe! Poor lady! O poor Mary!

Charles. In the name of God, Bartram, take Alice to your mother.

Alice. [*Resisting Bartram.*] My place is here with you. Mary is my sister, Charles. O Charles, my dear! my dear!

Charles. Then go with Bartram and send me a surgeon.

[*Alice goes, in haste, Right.*]

[*To Bartram.*] Keep her away from here.

[*Bartram follows Alice.*]

Mary. [*Moaning.*] Charles! Charles!

Charles. Be quiet, Mary. Come to your room.

Mary. [*Resisting him.*] Is there a spirit here? Not one clothed with flesh. [*Whispering.*] You know, Charles. A spirit.

Charles. O God! Mary! Mary! come with me to your room.

John. [*Looking up, his hand hovering over the*

cards, but absorbed in his game.] Too much confusion, Charles. It disturbs my game.

[*Constable comes in, Right.*]

Constable. [*Opening a roll of paper.*] I have a warrant here for one Charles Lamb.

Charles. Silence. Mary, come.

Constable. [*Droning on.*] For one Charles Lamb.

John. [*Looking up.*] Did master call?

Constable. Author of a set of scurrilous verses printed in the *Examiner* and called the Prince of Whales. [*Looks up, takes in the significance of the group.*] Good God!

Charles. Be off and get me a surgeon. For God's sake, man, a surgeon.

[*Constable goes, in haste.*]

Mary. Charles, what did I strike?

Charles. Your own heart. Your tender heart. Come, Mary, come.

[*He leads her toward the door, Left, always guarding her from the sight of the body on the floor.*]

THE FOURTH ACT

Time: a late evening. Twenty-five years have passed.
Scene: the Lambs' sitting-room in London. The walls are lined with books. The room is prepared for one of the Wednesday evenings when Lamb and Mary kept open house. A fire is burning in the grate. A large table, Back Centre, is covered with a white cloth. A small side table near it is piled with dishes. Above the larger table, from hooks on the mullions of the windows, hang pewter cups. A card table, Right.
Mary is busily taking dishes from the side table (Back) and arranging them in smaller piles on the larger table. She is stouter and wears a bunchy sort of brown stuff dress, a lawn neckerchief and white lawn cap.
Becky, a middle-aged serving woman, comes in.

Becky. Miss Mary! Shall I bring the roast?

Mary. Not until they're here.

[*A knock, Right.*]

Come in.

Becky. [*Busy about the table.*] Shall I go, Miss?

Mary. It's some stranger. The Wednesday night visitors know they're to walk in without ceremony.

Becky. [*Opening door, Right, and peering out.*] Yes, sir, Miss Mary's here. Yes, sir, quite alone.

Mary. [*Looking round.*] Some one for me? Ask him in.

Becky. If you please, sir.

[*Manning comes in, grown twenty-five years older, portly, in a traveling cloak and carrying a fine hat. Mary looks at him for a moment puzzled. Then she cries out. Becky closes the door and crosses to the door, Left.*]

Mary. Tom Manning? Home from China after all these years. [*Gives him both hands.*]

Manning. Where's Charles?

Mary. [*To Becky.*] Becky, where is he?

Becky. In the kitchen, miss, trying the potatoes with a skewer.

Mary. Send him in.

Manning. No, no, good Becky. Keep him out. I want to see Miss Mary.

Becky. Very good, sir. I'll ask him to mix the mustard. He says I've a heavy hand at it, a heavy hand.

[*Becky goes out, Left.*]

Mary. [*Looking at Manning in delight.*] Home from China. And so hale and hearty. When did you come?

Manning. This morning. [*She offers him a chair.*] I want two words with you.

Mary. You've not seen Charles?

Manning. Yes. At India House. But you weren't to be told.

Mary. The rascal!

Manning. I was to be a surprise. Mary, how are you?

Mary. Pretty well. Sometimes for six months at a time. Then my head gives out and I take Charles's hand and walk off to the asylum and stay there until I'm right again.

Manning. Dear Mary!

Mary. To think I haven't seen you since that night, all those years ago.

Manning. Don't think of it.

Mary. Oh, I think of it, often. It gives me a kind of courage. I say to myself, my will failed me for a minute, and I struck my dear mother and she died.

Manning. Mary, dear, there are things we must forget.

Mary. The first thing I learned afterward was that people were so kind. That little constable! how he told the coroner how he found us and how innocent I was of meaning to strike the dearest thing on earth to me—dearest except Charles. And how Coleridge spoke for me, and how Charles was forgiven his foolish verses, and I was only kept in the asylum until my reason came back to me, and Charles was allowed to take me home. All so kind—so kind.

Manning. [*Tenderly.*] It's been a hard pull.

Mary. Charles has done the pulling.

Manning. He's never balked.

Mary. Never.

Manning. Yet he's hated India House.

Mary. Charles is a man of letters. He should have had leisure for his books.

Manning. And his pension's a devil of a time coming.

Mary. His pension! I've waited for it as a man dying in the desert waits for water. I believe if it came my old head would flicker and go out like a candle.

Manning. [*Suddenly caught by the card table, Right.*] Isn't that your father's card table?

Mary. [*Smiling pathetically.*] Yes. Strange, isn't it? He's been gone this many a year, and here's the table as strong as ever.

Manning. What became of Alice Winterton?

Mary. Didn't Charles write you?

Manning. No.

Mary. She married Richard Bartram. Over and over she came here to see us, and Charles only prayed God love her and made her go away.

Manning. [*Listening.*] Is that Charles?

Mary. Better stay and see him.

Manning. I'll come in later, with the rest. That's the way he's arranged it. Surprise, you know. For you.

Mary. [*Proud and pleased.*] The way he treats me! You wouldn't think he was going on fifty and I over ten years older.

Manning. It's Charles's birthday.

Mary. Yes.

Manning. He means to celebrate my coming. Let's turn the tables on him.

Mary. And celebrate him?

Manning. Precisely. [*Takes an envelope from his pocket.*] Here's an envelope, with an enclosure.

Mary. For him?

Manning. To be presented to him to-night.

Mary. [*Listening.*] He's coming.

Manning. Take it.

[*He presses it into her hand and goes out, Right. Mary looks at the envelope doubtfully and tucks it in her bosom. Lamb comes in, Left. He is rustier than ever, but even sweeter and finer in the face. Mary again busies herself about the dishes.*]

Charles. [*Calling out hilariously.*]

I had a sister,
The devil kissed her
And raised a blister.

Mary. When you say that, Charles, I know I'm especially popular.

Charles. Dear as herring at a guinea a plate. [*He takes several packs of cards from the desk drawer, and arranges them on the card table. Sets a snuff box on the end of the table.*]

[*Mary busies herself about the dishes again, and then takes the hearth-brush and sweeps up the hearth.*]

Mary. [*As if to herself.*] A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigor of the game. Extract from an essay on Whist, by Charles Lamb, Esquire.

Charles. Mary!

Mary. Yes, Charles.

Charles. How many Wednesday nights do you think there've been?

Mary. Since creation?

Charles. Since the poets and actors and roisterers have come here to play whist and eat the Lambs out of house and home, God bless 'em.

Mary. A quarter of a century. I shouldn't like to climb the mountains of hot potatoes and cold roast beef they've swallowed.

Charles. Nor stem the raging torrent of good ale.

Mary. At least we've never been so poor we couldn't keep on dining and wining.

Charles. Or suppering and aleing. We're like charity that suppereth long.

Mary. Not that we can afford it.

Charles. The wind will be tempered to the shorn Lambs.

Mary. What's the matter with you, Charles? You've put the snuff box on the wrong end of the table.

Charles. Absence of mind, Mary. That's always been my ailment.

Mary. [*Mischievously.*] You've got a secret.

Charles. [*Appalled at her cleverness.*] The devil I have! How did you know?

Mary. I've one of my own.

Charles. [*Coaxingly.*] What is it, Mary? Tell me yours, you poor female creature, and that'll give me strength to keep mine.

Mary. Sit down a minute before they come.

[*They sit before the fire.*]

Charles. [*Coaxingly.*] Mary, your secret hasn't anything to do with mine, d'ye think?

Mary. It might have.

Charles. Does it begin with a B? Or a C?

Mary. It might.

Charles. A's for my 'appiness Mary doth make.

[*Crescendo.*]

B is for birthday and C is a cake!

[*Sobering.*] Ah, Mary, I'm an old fellow.

Mary. You're a famous fellow, with your books on so many tongues. In America, too. There they love you so well they kidnap you.

Charles. The Susquehanna where old Coleridge was going to found his colony. And now he's famous, even if he can't buy his own shirts.

Mary. [*Wistfully.*] And I'm a little famous.

Charles. Yes, you old blue-stocking. You're a writer yourself. Your underpinning's bluer than all the indigo that ever came through India House.

Mary. Charles, I've been thinking all day about the old life.

Charles. Old friends, too?

Mary. Father—and mother.

Charles. Dear old Mary!

Mary. Yes, I can think of mother. It wasn't I that hurt her. It was my sick mind.

Charles. Sure you'd better call back the old times? Sure it's best?

Mary. Yes. Because when I think of 'em there's always you, steady as the pendulum of a clock. Here —India House. India House—here. And when I've felt my wits going, your walking with me to the asylum and making it as commonplace as a broken arm.

Charles. Don't dwell on it, Mary.

Mary. And your living here alone till I come out again.

Charles. It's been a long time now, since we've

had to take that walk. [*Rousing himself.*] Now, come, come! Get the flags flying. To-night's a great night. And something's going to happen.

Mary. Yes, but you don't know what.

Charles. Yes, I do. But you don't.

Mary. It's my secret and I've kept it.

Charles. It's my secret and I can't keep it another damned minute. Manning's come home.

Mary. Pooh! nonsense! likewise fiddledeedee!

Charles. He has. He came to India House. I said, "We'll surprise Mary. That is if I don't burst. And if I do, it'll surprise you both." And now you know.

Mary. [*Slyly.*] Manning? I shouldn't believe it unless he walked into the room.

Charles. [*Delighted.*] Aha! You just wait. Mary, I believe since it *is* my birthday——

Mary. Since it is your birthday, Charles?

Charles. I really will leave off tobacco. [*Takes down his pipe, fills and lights it.*]

Mary. And since it is your birthday, Charles, I want you to understand I know how you take care of me.

Charles. And will, Mary.

Mary. [*Shuddering.*] I was just thinking about my wits. If they should go out like a candle——

Charles. [*Boisterously.*] They can't. We'll keep the candle in a lantern. [*Sobering.*] Ah, you must die first, Mary.

Mary. Yes, Charles, I must die first.

Charles. [*Trying to get hold of himself.*] What's

the matter with us? We seem to be auditing our accounts. Anyhow, if you've got nothing but silly praise for me!

Mary. You've kept me alive.

Charles. Ods bread and cheese! Don't you know the boot's on the other blue-stockinged foot? You've kept me alive. When I thought I should go under, I've said: "There's Mary."

Mary. And I say every hour: "There's Charles."

Charles. Oh, we're getting into the doldrums. [*Listens.*] Somebody's coming.

[*Coleridge comes in, Right. He has grown portly, old, and pathetic in his childish, wistful but still rapt and other-worldly look.*]

Coleridge, like the rum in punch. [*Gets up and goes to him.*]

[*They shake hands. Mary rises and goes to him. He kisses her cheek.*]

Same old archangel, only a little damaged!

Coleridge. [*Taking off his cloak with capes, which Mary relieves him of, opening door, Left, and hanging it there.*] Charles, I was particularly anxious to come to-night. I imagined there was some special reason.

Mary. Charles's birthday.

Coleridge. That latest friend of yours——

Charles. Crabb Robinson? A barrister, a man so bound to the conventions that if custom prescribed a nose ring he'd wear one as big as the wheel of a coach.

Coleridge. He told me I was to come. He wrote me reminders every day for a week. Besides that, I

had something inspiring to tell you. I have projected a new work, six octavo volumes setting forth my philosophy of the universe.

Charles. Bless your wig! you'll have to resurrect all the dead and gone philosophers to buy it.

Coleridge. [*Beaming benevolently.*] I do not desire money. I consider it an evil.

Charles. An evil, do you? It's a King's Evil then, and if I had it I wouldn't be cured of it by any laying on of hands.

Coleridge. No pension yet, Charles?

Charles. No. I have served the Philistines over thirty years, and my neck is not subdued to the yoke. India House is my coffin. I can't get out of it.

Coleridge. I have projected still another work.

Charles. An epic poem in twenty-four books. The Love Letters of Solomon. The Wanderings of Cain. Look at the man. He's as lean in the purse as Adam who hadn't any, yet he thrives on the thought of the work he means to do.

Coleridge. I am penniless, Charles, and resourceless. Yet I only wish life and strength might be spared me to complete my philosophy. I have projected it for the glory of God.

Charles. Dear old archangel!

[*Dyer comes in, with a bewildered air.*]

Another scholar, a ripe one ready for the plucking. [*Takes Dyer's hat from him.*]

Dyer. I was not altogether sure of the door.

Mary. [*Affectionately, taking the hat from Lamb and putting it inside the door, Left.*] You haven't

missed a Wednesday for twenty-five years, and you don't know our door.

Charles. See the absent-minded genius. He wonders whether he's beginning the evening or ending it. Coleridge! Mary!

[*Dyer is at a bookshelf, taking books down and putting them back. Lamb advances to him with his hand out.*]

Dyer, it's been a great pleasure to see you here.

Dyer. [*Putting a book up hastily. In confusion.*] God bless my soul! Is the evening over? Have they all gone?

Charles. Coleridge is here still.

Dyer. God bless me! it must be late. Coleridge, are you going my way?

Mary. Charles! for shame.

Charles. Dyer, you're as innocent as the dove in the egg. No, you fool! the evening's just begun.

Dyer. [*Beaming.*] You trade on my absence of mind.

Charles. We can bear anybody's absence of mind if it means your presence of body.

Dyer. [*Smiling broadly.*] Then if we're just beginning the evening, I'll read a bit. [*He returns to the bookshelf.*]

[*Coleridge follows him and begins to talk in dumb show. Dyer tries to escape, but Coleridge buttonholes him and Dyer, yielding, stands entranced, listening. Hazlitt comes in, Right.*]

Charles. Hazlitt! Hooray! I've got a secret.

Mary. Don't tell it now.

Charles. Mum as a fish. Manning's come home.

Hazlitt. Good! good! From China.

Charles. Been there a thousand years. Since I was young.

Hazlitt. [*Seriously.*] Do you know Manning's views on Waterloo?

Charles. Hazlitt, don't you bring your damned politics in here.

Coleridge. [*Catching the name.*] Bonaparte is a colossal figure, a gigantic replica of the spirit of the times.

Charles. I won't have politics in the house. Can't you leave 'em outside where a Mohammedan leaves his shoes?

Hazlitt. Can you see a colossal figure like Napoleon Bonaparte cast down from his pedestal?

Charles. Yes, I can. Better than I could old Dyer here. Dyer, what's this about your being made Prime Minister?

Dyer. [*Looking round, terrified.*] God bless me! they'd never do that.

[*Coleridge, his eyes closed, goes on talking to Dyer in dumb show.*]

Charles. Then you shouldn't have gone into public life.

Dyer. But I haven't, Lamb. I am absolutely unfitted for office. I shall decline it.

Charles. Then they'll hang you.

Dyer. God bless me, Lamb, they can't do that. There's no statute to cover it.

Hazlitt. He's making a fool of you, but I tell you, Dyer, there *is* a statute to provide for anything the public mind conceives. England could abjure the

French Revolution. She could—even break faith with Bonaparte.

Charles. No politics!

[*Manning comes in, Right.*]

Mary, here's Manning, with a parcel under his arm. I'll warrant it's a petticoat for you.

[*They go to him and shake hands, Coleridge waking to the fact that Dyer has escaped him, and coming last.*]

Manning. [*Giving Mary the parcel.*] China silk, Mary.

Charles. Unroll it and we'll wind it round her like ribbons round a May-pole.

Mary. [*Opening the parcel.*] What a sweet color!

Charles. Hear the old girl. Step up, Mary, and be wound in it like Pharaoh's daughter—and come out after three thousand years.

Mary. I can't let you muss my new silk.

[*She carries it off, Left.*]

Manning. [*To Charles.*] And a pipe for you. Carved ivory gods.

Charles. What a shame I've left off tobacco. [*He fills the pipe and smokes with great contentment.*]

Coleridge. [*To Manning.*] You have been in the land of Confucius.

Charles. And returned to the land of confusions.

[*Manning bursts into laughter.*]

Hazlitt. If Napoleon had not been wiped off the map, even China would have felt the impact of his genius.

Charles. No politics!

[*Crabb Robinson and Burney come in, the former*

indignant, the latter laughing immoderately. Robinson, holding the door ajar, looks out while he talks. Robinson is a bright little man, dressed in conventional fashion, and with precision in every word and movement. Burney is a younger man, a great admirer of Lamb and following all his movements with affectionate pride.]

Crabb Robinson! Martin Burney! [*Shaking hands.*]

Robinson. Lamb, it's a shame to desecrate this ancient building.

Coleridge. Desecrate! A solemn word.

Charles. What d'ye mean, Robinson?

Robinson. Rickman's out there. [*Pointing to the door, Right.*]

Charles. My agricultural friend. He hasn't driven a yoke of oxen up the stairs?

Robinson. No, but he's unpacking a hamper.

Charles. Then hamper him not. [*Calling from the door, Right.*] Hilliho, Rickman! What hast thou there? A hare, for a harum-scarum fellow? A leg of mutton for a muttonhead? A shoulder of brawn for a brawny shoulder?

[*Manning laughs.*]

Rickman. [*From without.*] Mary, bring a platter.

Charles. A platter.

Mary. [*Calling from door, Left.*] Becky, bring a platter. [*She receives it from Becky and passes it out to Rickman, Right.*]

Charles. He shall be plattered to the top of his bent.

[*Rickman comes in with a platter borne aloft in*

both hands, containing a pig with a lemon in his mouth and surrounded by a garland. He deposits it triumphantly on the side table.]

Pig!

Robinson. I call it vulgarity, Lamb, a glorification of the obvious, simply because you have written an essay on roast pig, that every owner of a sty in England should send you a pig to roast.

Charles. Robinson, do not blaspheme. 'Tis a stye-lish custom to send pigs. Behold him. Pause, Rickman, while I pronounce his eulogy. A pig is one of those things I receive with reverence and make one with myself. Teal, widgeon, snipes, barn-door fowls, ducks, geese, Welsh mutton, brawn, sturgeon, fresh or pickled, Swiss cheeses, French pies, early grapes, I impart as freely unto my friends as myself. I, too, would send them about in hampers. But, pardon me, I must stop somewhere. The pig is mine and I do but share him with my dearest. I could no more give him away in his entirety than a lobe of mine own brain. Rickman, 'tis a perfect pig. He shall be roasted, and eaten to the sound of harp and timbrel, and every man that enters shall taste his virtues.

[*Rearranging the card table.*]

There are the cards, boys. [*To Burney.*] Martin, you've washed your hands in the ink-pot. If dirt was trumps, what hands you'd hold.

[*Burney, Robinson, Manning, Rickman sit at the card table and are about to deal. Mary comes down and Lamb interrogates her tenderly.*]

All right, Mary?

Mary. All right, Charles.

Charles. Boys, wait a minute before you deal.

Manning. Speech! speech!

Charles. I can't make a speech. If I could I'd make myself a new one. Mine's got an im-p-pediment in it.

Robinson. What do you want to say? Tell me succinctly and I'll say it for you.

Charles. No, no. I'll worry through alone. Boys, this is a red-letter night, if I read it right. A poem, Mary! I've begun with a rhyme.

Robinson. [*With his stiff little air of helpful authority.*] Your birthday, Charles. That's quite understood. I've been at some pains to have it known.

Charles. No. I don't mean that. Of course it may be a leave-off-smoking night.

[*Manning laughs.*]

But that's not all. Manning's come home.

Manning. That's nothing. Even a lost cat comes home. Where's Leigh Hunt? Back from Italy?

Charles. This six months. Hanging garlands and writing verse.

Manning. Was he actually two years in jail for that silly Regent business?

Hunt. Yes. And as good as his word. He planted roses and sat under 'em and wrote prodigiously.

Robinson. My dear Charles, Hunt is a very pretty poet and a daring fellow with his tongue, but there's no reason for glorifying the mere fact of his imprisonment.

Charles. Damn it, Robinson, it isn't because he was imprisoned but because I wasn't.

[*Manning laughs. Lamb regards him affectionately.*]

Manning, you old hyena, you used to laugh when I said something good. Now I can't open my lips to hee-haw but what you haw-haw.

Manning. Never found anything like you among the Mongols.

Charles. Not the cream of Tartary?

Robinson. [*Insisting.*] That Hunt was convicted is no logical reason why you should have been.

Charles. Damn it, Robinson, there isn't any logical reason. The world isn't all logic any more than the green cheeses are all moons. [*Manning laughs.*] I got off and Hunt didn't. He's a brave fellow, and I never want to lose a chance of drinking his health.

[*Hunt comes in. He is older, but still exquisite and gay. He carries a laurel chaplet.*]

And here he is!

Hunt. My dear Lamb, in recognition of your literary fame, I have brought you a garland of bay.

Charles. God bless me. Rickman has brought me a pig.

Hunt. Let me crown you, Lamb.

[*Lamb shuffles away and Hunt, the wreath outstretched, follows him about the room.*]

It's a garland, Lamb, a garland of bay.

Lamb. Give it to Dyer. He's no horseman. He'd as soon have a bay as a roan.

[*As Hunt corners him by the card table Lamb seizes the wreath and claps it on the bust of Milton over the desk.*]

[*Sobering.*] I couldn't wear the laurel in such

company. Here's Coleridge—and Milton—and you—and the pig.

[*Manning laughs. Hunt turns to him at the sound and Lamb cries out in high glee.*]

Yes, yes! he's come home, Manning's come home.

[*Manning and Hunt shake hands. Becky comes in with the cold roast and does little things to the table. She goes in and out during the rest of the scene, bringing large tankards of ale from which the company pour into pewter mugs. From time to time one or another goes back to the table to drink and eat.*]

Charles. [*Filling a cup and giving it to Manning.*] Manning! Stoup o' wine!

Manning. [*Drinking.*] English ale, God bless it!

Charles. Now since I've left off smoking——

[*Listens, inclining his ear to Mary.*] What, Mary?

Mary. [*Placidly.*] You've no more left off smoking than a bad chimney.

Charles. But we've all left off drinking, and I can prove it by the Socratic method. Coleridge!

Coleridge. [*Majestically.*] Yes, Charles.

Charles. Is it not true that wine is a spirit?

Coleridge. In a form of speech. Not otherwise.

Charles. Is it not true that the spirit that lives eternally is more vital than the body that perisheth?

Coleridge. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, Charles, in a manner of speech.

Charles. If drink is the body of a vice, is not a drinking song the spirit?

Coleridge. I am uncertain whither you are leading me.

Charles. To a song, the Song of the Nose. For if we poor knaves are no longer to drink—because Mary doesn't like it—we have but buried the gross body of our vice. But in that song we have kept alive the spirit. And the spirit is incorruptible and harms no man.

All. Song! song!

Charles. The Song of the Nose.

[*The Card-Players rise. Hunt rouses Coleridge and Dyer from their talk and persuades them forward. Lamb jumps on a chair and beats time. They sing to the old tune of "Jolly Red Nose."*]

Of all the birds that ever I see,
The owl is the fairest in her degree;
For all day long she sits in a tree,
And when night comes, away flies she.
Te whit te whoo!
To whom drink'st thou?
Sir Knave, to you.
This song is well sung, I make you a vow
And he is a knave that drinketh now!
Nose, nose, jolly red nose!
And who gave thee that jolly red nose?
Cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and cloves,
And that gave me my jolly red nose.

Of all the vines that grow from the ground
The grape is the finest that ever I found.
In vats and vineyard great mercies abound,
So man may drink till he falls in a swound.
Ods cups and casks!
Is night time o'er?
Who is 't that asks?

For morning's a lackey that crawls to the door
With: 'Wassail to midnight! one rouse more!'
Nose, nose, jolly red nose!
And who gave thee thy jolly red nose?
Cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and cloves,
And that gave me my jolly red nose.

Of all the songs that ever I see,
The Song of the Nose is the one for me.
A rousing ditty, a catch or a glee,
They tune my pipes, wherever I be.
The lips! the eyes!
The lustrous glow
Of Beauty dies.
But after old Death has dealt me his blow,
This song shall be sung by knaves, I know.
Nose, nose, jolly red nose!
And who gave thee thy jolly red nose?
Cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and cloves,
And that gave me my jolly red nose.

[*While they sing, Becky has brought in a big pewter platter of roasted potatoes, and Mary goes to the side table, to make a place for it among the dishes.*]

Mary. [*Indulgently.*] Now, Charles, stop your mouth with a hot potato.

Charles. [*Jumping down from chair.*]
Potatoes, like a poultice, came
To heal the blow of sound.

[*Two or three of them go to the table, break open potatoes and, each with a half, wander round talk-*

ing and eating with a spoon. Lamb with a large salt cellar goes about asking, "Salt? salt?" Mary, Manning hurrying to help her, pushes back the card table, Right.]

Dyer. Speaking of spirits, Manning, you gave me quite a turn when you came in. I thought it was your spirit, no less.

Coleridge. It is a question, Saul and Hamlet to the contrary, whether a spirit has ever been seen by the human eye.

Charles. Dyer's subject to ghosts. There was the woman he drowned.

Dyer. [*Appalled.*] Drowned! I never drowned any one. [*Doubtfully.*] To my recollection.

Charles. You know Dyer was at one time a minister.

Dyer. Assuredly I was.

Charles. And he baptized a woman, held her under and pronounced a benediction, and when he remembered to take her up the poor soul was drowned.

Dyer. [*Anxiously.*] Lamb, I'm certain you are under a misapprehension. If I had done such a thing it could never have slipped my mind.

Mary. Don't you know Charles yet, Mr. Dyer?

Charles. I knew the woman. She's living to this day. Manning, you're as mum as a fish. But I'd rather have you sitting here mute than a regiment of rattle-pates. Yet I'd like the rattle-pates, too. I'd like to meet all the people in the world.

Robinson. Nine tenths of them you wouldn't sit down to supper with.

Charles. I'd sit with anybody—but a tailor—or his goose.

Burney. Mr. Lamb, don't you hate anybody?

Charles. I hate the Patagonians.

Robinson. You've never seen a Patagonian.

Charles. No. That's why I hate 'em. I never can hate anybody I *have* seen.

Coleridge. Ah, my gentle-hearted Charles!

Charles. Coleridge, don't call me gentle-hearted. Call me stuttering, web-footed, heron-legged, but for God's sake not gentle-hearted.

Burney. Let's make out a list of the people we'd like to see.

Charles. Pontius Pilate.

Robinson. That approaches blasphemy.

Hazlitt. Napoleon Bonaparte.

Coleridge. Milton.

Charles. Milton's face is too starched and puritanical. You couldn't go to market with him.

Dyer. Chaucer.

Rickman. Columbus.

Coleridge. The Wandering Jew.

Charles. Oliver Cromwell's rough old pimply face. Any women?

Mary. I should like to have seen Cleopatra. I'd ask her what unguents she used.

Charles. Judas Iscariot.

Manning. Reason! reason!

Charles. To see the face of him who having dipped his hand in the dish with the Son of Man could afterwards betray him.

Coleridge. [*Musingly.*] The Son of Man!

Charles. If Shakespeare were to come into this room we should rise up to meet him. But if That Person were to come into it, we should all fall down and kiss the hem of his garment.

Burney. Any actors coming to-night?

Mary. Fanny Kelly thought she could get round after the play, if she didn't stay to change.

Charles. Fanny Kelly! God bless her divine plain face.

Mary. And Munden.

Manning. What made Munden leave the stage?

Charles. The clock struck sixty years. 'Twas Munden's Exit.

Mary. *Sic transit gloria* Munden.

Dyer. [*Squeaking.*] Brava! brava!

Charles. Good for you, old girl. Ben Jonson has done worse—and better.

Mary. The play ought to be over.

Manning. [*Listening.*] There's a cab.

[*Fanny Kelly and Munden come in. She is a young woman dressed for the part of Lady Teazle, gay, straightforward, sweet. Munden is a typical old buck of a former day, somewhat artificial looking as if padded and stay-ed, and with manners of a creaking magnificence. Lamb and Mary greet them. Mary takes Fanny's cloak and Munden's hat and carries them away, Left.*]

Charles. Lady Teazle! You've brought us a genuine first night.

Fanny. This day, a few years ago, was *your* first night, I understand.

Charles. Half a century, my dear.

Munden. [*Bowing ceremoniously.*] And what so poor a man as Hamlet may, to show his love and friending! My congratulations, sir.

Mary. [*Coming down.*] Miss Kelly, you're tired and thirsty.

Fanny. I could eat a morsel.

Charles. Pig, Fanny, to-morrow. You must come to dinner. Swine before pearls.

[*Fanny and Mary go up and Fanny eats and drinks.*]

Munden. Do you remember, Charles, that last night of mine, when some good fellows sent me in six pots of porter to drink between the acts and I passed you out one from the orchestra pit?

Charles. 'Twasn't porter, Munden. 'Twas whatever the gods swig when they rollick up there on Olympus and play at quoits.

[*Mary has brought Munden a mug of ale and he is about to drink when Lamb stops him.*]

Not yet, Munden! not yet! A toast! a toast! Charge your bumpers!

[*Mary and Becky come round with mugs and flagons. They fill.*]

I give you—a man of courage. [*They drink.*] A man, a man, oh, damn it, a man that's too good to be stuttered over. Coleridge, you say it for me.

Coleridge. I esteem courage the first of the virtues. I esteem the man here who has shown it in its purest form, a great man, in his own way a hero.

Charles. [*Delighted.*] Good! That's what I

meant to say if I could have got ahead of my tongue. Manning, speech!

Manning. I can't, Charles. I can laugh at him, and cry over him. I can't tell what I think of him. But I drink to the best fellow I ever knew.

Charles. Dyer!

Dyer. [*Much agitated.*] My dear fellow, when I think of the past and how we were all young once—and meant to be famous—and how we're just old fellows—but there's one of us who'll be remembered when all the rest of us are forgotten, except Coleridge, perhaps, and that's not because he can write books, but because he's a damn good fellow.

Charles. [*Delighted.*] Hear that, Hunt, hear that? Hazlitt!

Hazlitt. I drink to a soldier.

Charles. Now don't you bring your damn politics in here.

Hazlitt. I don't mean Napoleon. I mean a man who's had more courage than Napoleon.

Charles. Speech, Hunt, speech! You've got to reply.

Hunt. You fool! They don't mean me.

Charles. Not mean you? Who is it they mean?

[*They all laugh. It dawns on him.*]

O my God! you don't mean me?

All. Speech! speech!

Charles. Mary! Don't let 'em. I'll leave the country.

Mary. [*Taking out letter.*] Charles, I was to give this to you. But since Fanny Kelly's here! Fanny, you give it to him.

Fanny. I have some lines to say. They were put into my hand to-night.

Munden. [*With majestic patronage.*] You were ever a quick study.

Fanny. [*Curtseying, recites:*]

"What, old friend, and art thou freed
From the bondage of the pen?
Free from care and toil indeed—
Free to wander amongst men—
When and howsoe'er thou wilt—
All thy drops of labor spilt
On those huge and figured pages
Which will sleep unclasped for ages
Little knowing who did wield
The quill that traversed their white field?"

[*Breaks down, laughs.*] There are three pages more, Charles. But it's all contained in this one little envelope. [*She gives him the envelope.*]

[*Lamb holds it, looking at them all in turn, dazed and wondering.*]

Charles. Freed? Was that the word, Fanny? Freed?

Manning. Look at it, Charles.

Charles. [*Helplessly.*] Am I to open it? [*He opens it, reads dazedly and calls, in a loud alarmed tone:*] Mary!

Mary. [*Hurrying to him.*] What is it, Charles?

Charles. [*Overcome.*] It's my pension.

Mary. [*Tremblingly.*] Yes, Charles?

Charles. [*Dazed.*] Mary, I'm free.

Mary. Yes, Charles, you're free.

Charles. [*Reading disjointedly.*] "In considera-

tion of—resolved—it appearing that he"—that's I, Mary—"that he has served the company faithfully for"—[*looking up whimsically*]—oh, what a horrible number of years—"that he"—that's I, Mary—"be allowed a pension of four hundred and fifty pounds per annum to commence from this date." [*Looking up from paper solemnly.*] It is like passing from time to eternity.

Manning. We'll be off now.

Charles. No! no! Desert Dives in his prosperity when you've stuck to Lazarus all these years?

Manning. [*Marshaling them all and hurrying preparations. To Charles.*] Mary's tired.

[*Mary rings, and stands leaning against the jamb of the fireplace, much agitated. Becky comes in with hats, coats, etc., which she deals out to them. They rapidly prepare to go.*]

Charles. [*Crossing to Mary.*] Is it all right, Mary?

Mary. [*Faltering and keeping her composure.*] All —right—Charles.

[*They go softly, with nods to Charles. He stands by Mary until they are gone.*]

Charles. Mary, are you quite all right?

Mary. I'm going to be, Charles. I mustn't spoil a night like this.

Charles. Not too tired?

Mary. [*With difficulty.*] No, not too tired, Charles.

Charles. [*Begins to walk up and down, talking agitatedly to himself, occasionally pausing to reflect.*] Since I was fourteen, to have been eight, nine, ten

hours at the counting house. But time reconciles us to anything. I grew content, doggedly content like wild animals in cages. And what were holidays? Before I had fairly tasted one it was gone and I was at the desk again. Besides my daytime drudgery I have gone through it all over again at night. I have wakened with terrors of imaginary false entries, errors in my accounts. I had grown to my desk. The wood had entered into my soul. Shall I miss my chains? Shall I be like a prisoner in the Bastille crawling out into the light? [*Recovering himself.*] No! no! I will take pleasure. I will walk about. I will read a book. Mary, if I had a son I would name him Nothing-to-Do. [*She does not answer.*] Mary! [*Turns, sees the trouble and vacancy that has come upon her face and hurries to her.*] Mary!

Mary. My head is—confused. I am afraid.

Charles. [*Tenderly.*] We'll sit by the fire, my dear, and talk of pleasant things. [*Bustles about, mending the fire.*] I'll stay with you till morning.

Mary. [*Putting her hand on his shoulder as he kneels at the fire.*] Charles, I've just enough wit to know you are free. Will it spoil it for you if you find the old trouble's back on us again?

Charles. [*Rising. Cheerfully.*] Why, no, Mary. That's life, old Mary. Happiness, pain. And then happiness again.

Mary. Could we go—you know where—to-night?

Charles. [*Hesitating.*] It's a long jaunt at midnight.

Mary. [*Crying out.*] But I am afraid.

Charles. Yes, my dear, yes. We'll go at once.

[*He brings her bonnet and shawl and puts them on her, she crying silently. He rings. Becky comes in.*]

Becky, Miss Mary is called away.

Becky. [*Aghast.*] Not there, Mr. Charles!

Charles. Yes. Come, Mary, come.

THE FIFTH ACT

Time: an evening eight weeks later.

Place: the Lamb sitting-room at Edmonton. Door Right 3. The books and prints are on the wall. There are pots of primroses on the window-sill, Back. Table, Centre. Desk. Bust of Milton. Fireplace Left 2. It is all arranged to be as much as possible like the London room.

Lamb sits, his elbows on the table, reading by the light of two candles. Suddenly he looks up, pushes his book away, leans back in his chair and muses.

Charles. [*In a wondering voice.*] Coleridge is dead.

[*Becky comes in, Right.*]

Becky. A lady, Mr. Lamb.

Charles. [*Rousing himself.*] To see me?

Becky. Yes, sir.

Charles. Did she ask for my sister?

Becky. Yes, sir. After she had asked for you.

Charles. What did you tell her about Mary?

Becky. I said she was not seeing any one.

Charles. Did she know what that meant?

Becky. She nodded, sir, as if she knew.

Charles. [*Rising.*] How do you think Mary is?

Becky. Quite the same, sir, as when you brought her home.

Charles. Did she notice this is not the London house?

Becky. I am not sure, sir.

Charles. If she notices, tell her we have moved here because the country is so cheerful.

Becky. Yes, sir. [*Remindingly.*] Will you see the lady, sir?

Charles. [*Rousing himself.*] Yes, yes. Ask her to come in.

Becky. [*At the door, holding it open.*] If you please, ma'am.

[*Alice comes in. She is sweet-faced, grey-haired and wears widow's black. She advances to Lamb, who looks at her, dazed.*]

Alice. [*Wistfully.*] I thought you would have known me.

Charles. [*Crying out.*] Alice Winterton!

Alice. Alice Bartram. But my husband is dead.

Charles. Why have you come?

Alice. I came before, Mr. Lamb, all those years ago.

Charles. That was a brave journey for a girl.

Alice. It was to make up for the harm I had done you.

Charles. 'Twas not harm, Alice. You opened the book of life to me.

Alice. Now I come because life itself has done you an ill.

[*Lamb offers her a chair. She shakes her head.*]

Charles. Do you move about the room as you used to? Like a butterfly? I used to watch you, your restless, pretty fluttering. Do you do that now?

Alice. [*Whimsically.*] Ah, there's nobody to watch what I do now.

Charles. Your children.

Alice. I'm "mother." They expect to see me sitting by the fire.

Charles. It's a good place, Alice. Come here and sit.

[*He places chairs at the hearth and she sits.*]

Alice. Sit down on the other side.

Charles. [*Whimsically.*] Darby and Joan? No. Look across the hearth at you? And then, when you are gone, to see the empty chair? No! no!

Alice. It's Mary's chair.

Charles. [*Affectionately.*] That's Mary's by the window. I never put anybody in Mary's chair.

Alice. [*Courageously.*] Charles, how is Mary?

Charles. Quite herself for months. Then if she gets tired or excited or for some reason the devil only knows, she loses her dear wits. Mislays them. [*Recovering himself.*] But she finds them again. And then we're as happy as we can persuade ourselves to be with our old enemy lurking round the corner.

Alice. And he's always round the corner?

Charles. With a club. Sometimes we dodge it. He's a brutal marksman. Clever dog!

Alice. I found you had moved out of London.

Charles. [*Looking up quickly.*] Have you known about us?

Alice. All these years.

Charles. Yet you'd moved out of London yourself.

Alice. Oh, I've known about you. I wondered at you for going out of London, you loved it so.

Charles. It's for Mary. I've more money and my leisure. So Becky and I moved here, while she was away, with all the books and prints and pots and pans.

Alice. To wait for Mary to be herself again?

Charles. Yes. She's sure to be.

Alice. Do you see your friends?

Charles. Often. They're very good. But [*with wondering gravity*] Coleridge is dead.

Alice. [*Impatiently.*] Why do I beat about the bush? Charles, this task of yours is terrible.

Charles. Taking care of Mary? No. It's a dear old task. I'm as used to it—as breathing.

Alice. It breaks your heart.

Charles. [*Whimsically.*] Is that the matter with my heart? I wonder.

Alice. She away there, and you here waiting. Then, Charles, your heart does break. You think of the old times, the old friends.

Charles. [*Involuntarily and as if to himself.*] Coleridge is dead.

Alice. You think of what life might have been.

Charles. Don't, Alice. I am too poor in hope to afford tears.

Alice. I know you, because I've kept on knowing you all these years. I read the beautiful things you write. What you wrote about Dream Children. Was that all fancy?

Charles. [*With sudden warmth.*] I said the children of Alice call Bartram father.

Alice. My children are married.

Charles. Poor Alice! you are alone.

Alice. And free. Charles, let me come to you.

Charles. To me?

Alice. In whatever way you will.

Charles. [*Moved.*] To Mary and me?

Alice. Yes.

Charles. Mary must be first.

Alice. She shall.

Charles. [*Incredulously.*] You would come to us, put out the candle-light with the gleam of that hair I loved so long ago?

Alice. [*Courageously.*] Look at me, Charles. The gold is grey.

Charles. Silver. I should live under the spell of those kind eyes.

Alice. I can't read your books without my spectacles.

Charles. The blue of the sky is in them yet. Such a kind heaven! Such unclouded blue!

Alice. [*Rising.*] May I come, Charles?

Charles. Why would you come, dear?

Alice. [*Confused.*] Don't ask for reasons.

Charles. [*Humbly.*] Once I might have asked. Now I'm too old.

Alice. No. And perhaps I'm old enough to give them without shame.

Charles. I thought that hunger had died in me. But it's there. To hear a woman say—to hear you say—

Alice. If I may live here with you, that would be the way I could say it.

Charles. [*Listening.*] Hush! Mary is coming.

Alice. Shall I go?

Charles. No. She must see you. We must know

whether you get through the mist she dwells in at such times, or whether a stranger only troubles her.

Alice. I mustn't trouble her.

Charles. The best can do that when she's not herself, the best and dearest.

[*Mary comes in, Left. She wears the almost Quaker costume and cap. She looks unrecognizingly at them, but is apparently, in a vague way, quite happy.*]

Mary. I had thought to find Coleridge here.

Charles. [*Irrepressibly.*] Coleridge is [*checks himself*] not here.

Mary. Coleridge was very gifted. I have not seen him in a long time. But I should know him. I should know them all. My brother Charles wrote a poem about them. I can repeat it.

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

For some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed.
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

The Old Familiar Faces. That was its name. He meant Coleridge and Manning and Hazlitt. I'll tell you a secret we never mention even between ourselves, Charles and I. [*Mysteriously.*] I think he meant one most of all.

Charles. Who was it, Mary?

Mary. [*With the air of telling a secret.*] Alice Winterton.

Charles. [*In acute emotion.*] Mary, do you see this lady?

Mary. [*Indifferently.*] She's not real.

Charles. [*Imploringly.*] Touch her hand. Look in her face. Who is it, Mary?

[*Alice timidly takes her hand, but Mary withdraws it and brushes it with the other, as if to brush off the touch.*]

Mary. A vision.

Charles. [*Sadly, to Alice.*] That was what I called you when you came that other time.

Alice. [*Eagerly.*] But you let me stay, and I showed you I was real. [*To Mary.*] Mary!

Mary. [*Wisely, to her.*] You must not speak, or you will vanish. You wouldn't like that, would you?

Alice. I'm not a vision, Mary. I am—

Charles. [*Interrupting quickly.*] Don't. We must not startle her.

Mary. You'd better go away. I am in the habit of inviting the visions I want, but if the rest of you get in the habit of dropping in the room will be too crowded.

Charles. Mary, this lady came to bring us the most beautiful gift in the world.

Mary. People used to send books for my brother Charles, and little pigs to roast. That was because he wrote an essay on roast pig. [*To Alice, kindly.*] Now run away. I expect the French court here immediately. Marie Antoinette is coming, in her diamond necklace. Her poor husband is coming, too. They'll cut off their heads for them later. I sha'n't let them do it in here. It is too disturbing.

Charles. [*Trying to recall her.*] Mary, don't you like this lady?

Mary. [*Shaking her head.*] She confuses me. She makes me think of things that should have been and never can be now. [*Smiling at him.*] But I like you. You remind me of my brother Charles.

Charles. [*Imploringly.*] Mary, if your brother Charles had married, if he had married this lady, we'll say, you'd like to have her here.

Mary. No, no, I tell you. Charles should have married Alice.

Charles. [*Half fearfully.*] Mary, if I told you this is Alice.

Mary. [*Laughing lightly.*] No! no! Alice was all blue and gold. This is a vision. A grey vision. She confuses me. I want no new faces here. [*Dreamily.*] No: the old familiar faces.

Charles. [*In despair.*] The old familiar faces.

Mary. I'm going now. The French court is waiting in the other room. [*To Alice.*] You? No! no! You're grey and white. You're not one of them—the old familiar faces.

[*Mary goes out, while they watch her.*]

Charles. [*Sadly, to Alice.*] You see.

Alice. She rejects me. Do you reject me, Charles?

Charles. There's but one thing for me to do.

Alice. The same thing you've done for the last thirty years.

Charles. Taking care of Mary. One prayer to say: Let me outlive Mary.

Alice. And I can't help you?

Charles. You heard her.

Alice. I'll go, Charles.

Charles. [*Detaining her with an imploring passion.*] Alice, wait. [*Brokenly.*] God love you. For remembering.

Alice. [*Gently.*] I shall remember always.

Charles. God bless you for coming. Like an angel.

Alice. [*Smiling sadly.*] No, Charles. Like a woman.

[*He stands watching her. She pauses at the door, turns to smile at him and goes. Mary comes in, brisk, cheerful, quite herself.*]

Charles. [*Cries out.*] Mary!

Mary. The cloud has lifted from my brain. Like a mist. As if I had had some shock. As if somebody had called to me. Has anybody been here?

Charles. I have been here.

Mary. Waiting for the cloud to lift?

Charles. Waiting, Mary. Now we'll sweep up the hearth. [*Takes the brush.*]

Mary. [*Taking it from him.*] Let me do it. Dear old brush! [*Startled.*] But it's not the same hearth, Charles.

Charles. No. I've moved all the old things down here, hearth-brush and all, because Mary never was a cockney and London's bad for her. [*Rings.*] We'll have a little supper now.

[*Becky comes in.*]

Bring us the joint and a bottle of ale.

[*Becky goes out.*]

Mary. To live here in the country all the time?

Charles. All the time. Ods larks and primroses!

Mary. [*Settling herself by the hearth.*] Can we

have roasts and hot potatoes here and Wednesday nights?

Charles. [*Walking about as if he could not quiet.*] And all the brave crowd—Hazlitt—

Mary. And Coleridge!

Charles. Ah, Coleridge!

Mary. They won't come out here into the country often.

Charles. [*Quietly.*] Not often. [*Recovering himself.*] But you and I'll be like toothache and his friend gum-boil and ache together and get well.

[*Becky comes in bringing plates, etc., and goes out again.*]

Mary. It's like a festival. I'll put on another cap.

Charles. And I'll dream here by the fire.

[*Mary goes out. Lamb seats himself by the hearth and puts his hand over his eyes. The room darkens and grows light again. Alice Winterton, as she was in Act I, is moving about the room, giving little touches to the furniture, as if she were setting things in order. She touches the flowers and, by an effect of light, they brighten. She turns to the door, smiles and holds out her arms. Two Children, in white angelic clothing, run to her. She stoops to them and the room darkens and grows light again as it was at the beginning of the Act. Mary comes in, brisk and cheerful. Lamb stands looking off, as if seeing visions.*]

Mary. What is it, Charles?

Charles. [*Recalling himself.*] Mary, you know the night the letter came about my pension.

Mary. A great night, Charles.

Charles. My pension! I thought I was rich.

Mary. You thought so? Weren't you?

Charles. Not so rich as I am now.

Mary. Money, Charles?

Charles. No.

Mary. Me, Charles?

Charles. Yes. And what we have to remember. Pledge me, Mary.

[*He fills the cups and they pledge each other.*]

Old friends.

Mary. The old familiar faces.

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